YANG MO

THE SONG OF YOUTH

THIS is a stirring story about patriotic students in Peking from the time of the Japanese occupation of the Northeast in 1931, to the upsurge of the student movement in 1935, on the eve of the War of Resistance Against Japan. It shows how young intellectuals under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party fought with courage and determination against Japanese imperialist aggression and the Kuomintang capitulationist policy.

The experiences of the young heroine, Lin Tao-ching, illustrate the way in which many young progressives, at first frustrated and uncertain, blossomed into maturity during the course of revolutionary struggles. Others, few in number, waver and join the camp of reaction only to degenerate still further. The clash between strikingly different personalities and the many adventures of the characters reflect the complexity of Chinese society in the thirties and vividly portray the revolutionary tradition of China's youth.

The People's Republic of China

List of Principal Characters

(In order of appearance)

- Lin Tao-ching
  - a young woman intellectual
- Lin Po-tang
  - Tao-ching's father, a big landlord
- Hsu Feng-ying
  - Tao-ching's stepmother
- Hu Meng-an
  - chief of the Kuomintang secret service in Peiping
- Wang Hsiao-yen
  - Tao-ching's schoolmate
- Yu Ching-tang
  - a big landlord
- Yu Yung-tse
  - a Peking University student
- Lu Chia-chuan and Li Meng-yu (alias Chiang Hua)
  - leaders of the student movement
- Lo Ta-fang, Hsu Ning and Hsu Hui
  - university students active in the revolutionary movement
- Wang Hung-pin
  - a professor in Peking University
- Pai Li-ping
  - a university student who degenerates and becomes a society girl
- Liu Yi-feng (Big Sister Liu)
  - a veteran Communist
- Tai Yu (alias Cheng Chun-tsai)
  - a renegade
- Wang Yen-wen
  - headmistress of a primary school
- Wu Yu-tien
  - a primary school teacher, and agent for the Kuomintang secret service
- Chen Chin
  - a woman Communist
- Yu Shu-hsiu
  - a schoolgirl
- Hou Jui
  - a revolutionary student
- Wang Chung
  - a Peking University student, and agent for the Kuomintang secret service
- Li Huai-ying and Teng Yun-hsun
  - Peking University students

THE SONG OF YOUTH

Yang Mo

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Translated by
NAN YING

Illustrated by
HOU YI-MIN

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Foreword

The first half of the 1930s was a dark period for China. The country was in the throes of a desperate national crisis. The Japanese imperialists, after occupying China's four northeastern provinces on September 18, 1931, encroached further into Chinese territory. Step by step they attacked Shanghai, Chahar and Suiyuan, occupied east Hopei and schemed to seize all five provinces of North China. . . . The country was threatened with destruction, but the Kuomintang government adopted a policy of capitulation and signed various agreements ceding sovereign rights to Japan. It also sent forces numbering hundreds of thousands, sometimes a million, against the revolutionary bases and the Red Army, which had been set up by the Chinese Communist Party and were resolutely opposing Japanese aggression. Subsequently it sent troops to pursue and intercept the Red Army on its northward march to resist Japan, and in White territory arrested and killed countless Communists and young patriots. Then, led by the Chinese Communist Party, young people who loved their country launched a hard, determined struggle. In the winter of 1935, when the Japanese set up a puppet government in Hopei and Chahar and the whole of North China was threatened, Peiping students, with the rousing slogan "People of China rise up to save the country!", launched the historic December the Ninth Movement, the glorious prelude to the Chinese people's resistance to Japanese aggression.

These events are the background to the story of *The Song of Youth.* Undaunted by machine-guns and bayonets, imprisonment, tortures or even execution, innumerable fine young men and women put up a stubborn fight against the enemy. When one fell, another rose to take his place. Some died smiling, confident that the country had a bright future; more marched forward in the blood-stained footprints of the fallen. . . . At last in 1949 China was liberated, the dream of so many who had laid down their lives came true, and China started to build socialism on a stupendous scale. We who lived to see such lovely flowers of victory could not but recall those who had shed their blood to nurture them. That is why, in 1950, I started writing this novel. I was deeply stirred by all I had seen and heard of the heroism of the revolutionaries.

During the years my book covers, I was a student unable to continue my studies or find a job. I knew from my own experience how hard was the lot of intellectuals in old China, and that the only way out for young people was to follow the Communist Party and take part in the revolution. With this in mind, I created the character of Lin Tao-ching. This novel is a young intellectual's protest against the old society.

Light is stronger than darkness, nobility stronger than baseness; unselfishness must triumph over selfishness and happiness over sorrow . . . we must live like real men. That is what I have tried to express in my writing. If this book enables friends abroad to better understand why the Chinese revolution succeeded and how dauntlessly the Chinese people — especially the youth — struggled on, I shall feel well rewarded.

Yang Mo

Peking, May 1963

PART I

Chapter 1

Early one morning the Peiping-Shenyang express was speeding over the vast, jade-green countryside. Luxuriant crops, silver streams, light brown mud houses and telegraph poles flashed past the passengers seated by the carriage windows. Gratefully inhaling the fresh morning air, they watched the fields until, tiring of the sight, they turned away, some yawning while others looked around for something new or interesting inside the train. Before long the attention of quite a few was caught by some unusual luggage: a small bedding-roll to which were tied a fiddle, a bamboo pipe and a flute, each wrapped in fine white silk. Nearby was a balloon guitar, a moon-guitar and a small reed-organ. . . . Some passengers surmised that these must belong to a dealer in musical instruments. Actually the owner was no merchant but a schoolgirl of eighteen, who was keeping a steady eye on her dainty belongings. She was wearing a short white muslin gown, white cotton stockings and white canvas shoes, and in her hand was a plain white handkerchief — in short, she was dressed from head to foot in white. Travelling alone, she was sitting perfectly still in one corner of the carriage and looking out of the window. Her face was pale, but her large black eyes were brilliant. Soon this solitary, attractive but simply clad girl had aroused the interest of her fellow passengers, particularly of the men, who began to exchange remarks and hazard guesses about her. She remained quite oblivious, however, as if totally detached from her surroundings. For a long time she sat like this, lost in her thoughts.

Her unusual air, strange beauty and apparent fondness for music occasioned considerable curiosity, and she soon became the central topic of conversation.

"D'you think she's been crossed in love?" whispered a student in Western clothes to his companion.

"That stack of instruments would fetch a good ten to twenty silver dollars at least," announced a fat merchant approaching the student with a calculating look on his face. "What can a young lady want with all those? Does she sing in the streets for a living, do you suppose?"

The student did not deign to answer, but after one look at the merchant turned away. Thereupon he rejoined his companions, not however without first ogling the girl in white.

When the train stopped at Peitaiho the girl got off, carrying her instruments which appeared to be almost all the luggage she had. The passengers continuing their journey watched her with puzzled, sympathetic eyes as she walked along the platform.

The little station was very quiet. The momentary hum and bustle which accompanied the arrival of a train passed like the white smoke of the locomotive, leaving the place once again silent and deserted.

With her luggage in her hands, the girl stood looking round in all directions, but apparently no one had come to meet her. She found a porter and asked him to carry her things to Yangchuang Village.

Her melancholy did not leave her as with head low she silently followed the porter. After a while they rounded a bend in the hills, and there, below the serene blue sky and beyond the vivid green of the fields, was a vast expanse of ocean stretching to the horizon. The girl halted and gazed at the sea, her eyes sparkling with awe and delight. "Oh!" she cried. "This is my first glimpse of the sea — how magnificent!" She stood as if rooted to the ground, spellbound by the sight of the calm deep and the gently rolling waves.

"Come along, miss! Come on! What's keeping you?" The porter, unaware of her mood, had already reached the foot of the hill.

She appeared not to have heard, but remained transfixed, her eyes upon a lonely white sail in the distance.

"Hey, miss! What's the matter?" The porter, growing impatient, called more loudly and at last succeeded in attracting her attention. Rubbing her eyes and smiling, she ran down the slope to join him.

The porter was a talkative middle-aged man.

"What were you staring at up there?" he asked, unable to restrain his curiosity.

"At the sea. It's so beautiful." She looked round at him. "How lucky you are to live here! It's so lovely!"

"What's lovely about it? If we don't catch any fish and go hungry, scenery doesn't count for much. Tell me what you are doing here," he continued, smiling. "Why are you alone? Are you here on holiday?"

She smiled back pleasantly and after a pause said, "I can't afford a holiday. I've come to visit my cousin."

"Your cousin?" The man's eyes widened. "Does he work in the Police Bureau?"

"No!" She shook her head. "He's a teacher in the Yangchuang Primary School."

"You don't say! I know all the teachers here. Which is he?"

"Chang Wen-ching." More animated now, she asked naively, "Do you know him? Is he in the village? I wonder he didn't come to meet me. . . ."

Suddenly the man's lips seemed sealed. Though the girl looked inquiringly into his dark, wrinkled face, instead of answering her question he walked on a few steps and changed the subject, asking:

"What's your name? Are you from Peiping?"

"My name's Lin Tao-ching," she told him candidly. "Yes, I'm from Peiping. But don't you know my cousin?"

Again the man lapsed into silence. After quite an interval he coughed and muttered something inaudible and the girl let the matter drop. So they made their way to Yangchuang Primary School, where the porter took his money and left her, and the girl slowly mounted the stone steps at the gate.

The school was housed in the large Temple to the God of

War at the edge of the village. Leaving her luggage at the gate, Tao-ching walked in. She looked into all the classrooms in the temple halls, but not a soul was about. Reflecting that everyone might be on the beach, she went back to the gate to wait.

Dusk was gathering and smoke was curling from every chimney in the village. Cicadas were chirruping lustily from the coppice outside the temple. Tao-ching listened to them as she waited, looking out anxiously from time to time. Still no one appeared, and with her luggage to watch, she could not stray far. When darkness had fallen an old man came lurching down the road. As he caught sight of her he called out:

"Who are you looking for?"

Tao-ching eagerly raced down the steps to greet him with the question: "Is Mr. Chang Wen-ching a teacher here?"

"Oh, you're looking for Mr. Chang, are you?" His face was red and his voice slurred from drinking. "Well, he's not here any more."

Tao-ching was taken aback. "Where has he gone?" she asked. "He said in his letter that he'd be staying here during the holidays. What about his wife, then? She teaches here too. . . ."

"Can't tell you, I'm sure." The old man lurched drunkenly up the steps, stumbled through the gate and slammed it behind him.

Tao-ching had written to her cousin telling him when she expected to arrive, and his disappearance plunged her into a dilemma. She did not know what to do. Standing alone on the steps, utterly at a loss, she stared blankly at the dark trees from which the cicadas were shrilling as loudly as ever. The sea, out of sight, kept up a steady murmur as it pounded insistently against the cliffs. She knocked at the gate a couple of times, but there was no response. Most likely the old drunkard was asleep. Her heart ached and tears welled into her eyes. She stood there in her loneliness a long, long time.

A bright moon rose and its silver rays filtered like gossamer through the lacy tree-tops to caress the lovely face of the solitary girl. Leaning against the stone tablet at the gate, she lowered her head and gave way to painful sobs.

In time of difficulty one tends to recall the past, and as Tao-ching wept she thought back over the train of events that had made her leave her parents and home, had brought her to this deserted copse by the seaside where there was not a soul she knew, and caused her heart to overflow with bitter sorrow.

Chapter 2

In a remote mountain village in Jehol there lived a family of two, Old Li and his granddaughter, Hsiu-ni. Old Li was ill and stayed on the *kang* all day long while Hsiu-ni went out to gather firewood or cultivate a little patch of land to support the two of them. She was a comely, sturdy and capable girl of twenty-one, to whom all the young men in the village were attracted. She was unmarried, however; for at the age of eleven she had been sent away as a child-bride, and when she was fifteen her betrothed had died and she returned home. This experience had left its mark on her, and with her grandfather to care for she was in no hurry to marry. The ailing old man and the girl were dependent on each other, and he was so fond of her that when his married daughter, who lived in another village, sent him rice-flour cakes or salted eggs, he would keep the greater part of the precious gift for her. The plot Hsiu-ni cultivated belonged to a landlord, and after the rent had been paid each year hardly anything remained to them but stubble only sufficient for a few days' fuel. Anxious to provide her aged grandfather with a bowl of hot rice gruel, after her work in the fields she would take her axe to the hills to cut firewood. She also took in sewing, which she would do by lamplight in the evening. The villagers had nothing but praise for this fine, hard-working, simple girl and thought what an excellent wife she would make for some young man! But the year she was twenty-one, misfortune befell her. Their landlord, Lin Po-tang, came from Peiping to collect his rents that winter, saw Hsiu-ni's beauty, and became determined to make her his concubine. He was well over fifty and had already had a number of concubines — some from brothels — the more charming of whom his wife Hsu Feng-ying had driven away. Now he became enamoured of healthy, unsophisticated Hsiu-ni, and must have her at any price. He was accompanied by soldiers who had been despatched by Tang Yu-lin, the military governor of Jehol, to quell any resistance by his tenants while he collected rents. Hsiu-ni and her grandfather were powerless in the face of such brute force, and she was carried off to the home of one of Lin Po-tang's lessees in the village where she was installed as the landlord's concubine. She wept bitterly and tried to kill herself, but all her resistance and protests were in vain; for Lin Po-tang, grinning as he stroked his moustache, had his way with her.

Two months later, when Hsiu-ni was with child, Lin took her to his home in Peiping. That same night her old grandfather tottered by the aid of his stick to the Paiho River near the village and jumped in.

As for Hsiu-ni, residence in Lin's household in Peiping changed her from a bright, intelligent girl into a witless creature who would go all day without uttering a word and who, except when eating or doing some job, would look blankly at the wall. When Lin's wife saw that Hsiu-ni was pregnant she did not treat her badly during the first few months, for none of her own children had lived, and she wanted a child for the Lin family.

With the birth of her child Hsiu-ni's spirits revived a little, and she lavished all her love on the chubby baby girl. A smile on the pretty infant face could ease her mental anguish, make her forget her humiliation for a while, and give her courage to go on living. Late at night, when Lin had gone to another concubine, Hsiu-ni liked to get up quietly to change her baby's diapers or nurse it and kiss its bonny cheeks. Then, choking with emotion, she would murmur:

"Grow, my treasure, grow! As long as you're alive I've something to live for." Tears that had long since run dry coursed anew on to the baby's tender face. For her child's sake Hsiu-ni would live on.

When the baby was a year old her merry prattle and her tiny fingers patting her mother's cheek made Hsiu-ni's face light up with happiness, but one day Hsu Feng-ying sent for Hsiu-ni and, taking the child from her, said sternly:

"This is Mr. Lin's daughter — I'll look after her. Get out, you shameless beggar!"

Hsiu-ni was stunned and, weeping bitterly, dashed her head wildly against the wall. She vainly struggled to get hold of the child in Hsu Feng-ying's arms who stretched out her little hands and cried for her mother. Lin Po-tang, who had tired of her, kept out of the way. And Hsiu-ni was seized by his brutal servants and bundled into a car which was waiting at the gate to take her away.

Hsiu-ni's child was given the name Tao-ching by Lin Po-tang. At first he and his wife were quite fond of her, but when she was three and Hsu Feng-ying gave birth to a son, the little girl's troubles began. Beaten for the least offence, she slept with the servants and was not allowed in the main rooms unless specially required. She spent her time playing in the streets with the waifs who went about collecting cinders from the garbage heaps.

One winter day Hsu Feng-ying, in a good humour, called Tao-ching in and soon noticed how fidgety the child was as she stammered out replies to her questions. Surprised, she drew Tao-ching to her and asked what was the matter.

"I feel so itchy . . ." answered Tao-ching, who was seven at the time. Her nose was running and she looked ready to cry.

A rare wave of compassion swept over Hsu Feng-ying and, taking off the child's tattered jacket, she was horrified to find that the garment beneath was crawling with lice. In a fit of indignation, she thrust the infested clothing into the stove. Then, pleased with her own display of kindness, she looked searchingly at Tao-ching's face, which was chapped and purple with cold. Turning to her husband, lolling on the couch with a newspaper, she said:

"It strikes me that this imp's not at all bad-looking. If we send her to school, we'll get a good return for our investment when she grows up."

"An excellent idea!" Lin nodded, stroking his moustache. "You always see further than anyone else, my dear. There's no truth left in the old saying 'An ignorant and uneducated woman makes a virtuous wife'. By all means let her study."

So little Tao-ching was sent to school, where she took to her studies eagerly and proved an apt pupil. She was unlike other children, and spoke so seldom that strangers thought her dumb, and never cried when her half-brother, who was pampered by his mother, tormented or hit her. Sometimes she just let him strike her; at others she lost her temper and hit back, although this always entailed severe reprisals. Her stepmother seldom beat her, preferring to twist her arm, pinch or bite her. One night, Tao-ching was asleep in the servants' quarters when the boy broke one of his mother's favourite vases and put the blame on his half-sister. Tao-ching, roughly snatched from her bed, realized what was afoot and gritted her teeth ready to bear the ordeal in store.

"Shameless little slut! You get bolder every day. I'll make you pay for that vase, see if I don't!"

Her leg was pinched and twisted and her arm was bitten, but Tao-ching was used to being treated worse than a dog. She neither cried nor begged for forgiveness, and not a tear fell from her unblinking eyes. The only one in the household who showed any concern for her was Aunty Wang, an old nurse who did what she could for the child behind Hsu Feng-ying's back. Naturally Tao-ching came to love Aunty Wang, turning to her when she was hungry or cold, and none but this motherly old servant ever saw her in tears.

When Tao-ching finished primary school and was admitted to a high school for girls in the Western Hills outside Peiping, there was a noticeable improvement in her stepmother's attitude. Tao-ching had grown into a tall, slender attractive girl. Her face was a shapely oval, her skin fair and flawless as translucent jade, and her long black eyebrows arched gently towards her temples. But her most striking feature was her eyes, both sad and arresting. She had always been a quiet child who kept to herself most of the time, not caring much for company. This was not what interested Hsu Feng-ying, however, but the fact that the girl was blossoming into a beauty. She decided to give her the education considered requisite for a smart young lady who was to marry a wealthy and influential man.

On the day that Tao-ching left for boarding-school, her gratified parents saw her to the gate where a ricksha was waiting. Lin Po-tang clothed in a long silk gown stroked his moustache reflectively as he stood on the marble steps outside the gate. Then, smiling at Tao-ching who was seated in the ricksha, he said:

"Congratulations, young lady! Going to high school is equivalent to winning the degree of a *hsiu tsai*:* Ha, ha, ha!"

Lin Po-tang, who enjoyed the reputation of an educationalist and philanthropist, had passed the second government examination in the Ching Dynasty and had become a *chu jen*, but before he could go to the capital for the final examination the Reform Movement of 1898 was started by Kang Yu-wei and Liang Chi-chao, and the Imperial University, predecessor of Peking University, was founded. Then Lin, anxious to keep abreast of the times, moved to the capital with his wife and enrolled in the newly-established university. Then came the republic and, trimming his sails to the prevailing wind, he became an educationalist as education was the fashion. Under the pretext of starting schools, he bought, at a nominal price, large tracts of land formerly bestowed upon Manchu princes by the emperor. Then visiting cards bearing the grandiose titles of *chu jen*, scholar of the Imperial University, Superintendent of Minan Orphanage and President of Wupen University, circulated freely among the "cream" of society. None of those who paid respect to the venerable and gifted Professor Lin Po-tang ever mentioned his brutal treatment of the unhappy Hsiu-ni.

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* The title given to those who passed the first of the old government examinations.

Lin Po-tang was quite well-versed in the Four Books and Five Classics and had also read books by the Western philosophers Kant and Montesquieu, but to him there was nothing higher than membership of the Hanlin Academy. That was why he compared his daughter's entry into high school with the degree of *hsiu tsai*.

Her stepmother followed up with advice, not giving Tao-ching a chance to answer her father. Plump enough to be troubled by the late summer heat, she was waving a small silk fan as she stood on the steps. She too felt a certain pride as she appraised her stepdaughter.

"Be a good girl, my dear, and study hard! Mother will find money for you to finish high school and go on to the university. If you go abroad for post-graduate study, you'll come back better off than a woman *chuang yuan** — and there'll be no limit to your fame and riches!" She turned with a snort to her husband and demanded: "What are you laughing at, you old fossil? I brought her up! When she starts earning money and gets rich, you shan't have a cent of it!"

Hsu Feng-ying sputtered as if angry, but Lin Po-tang chuckled and nodded in amusement. "Very well, my dear, it shall all be yours, every cent! Even what your future son-in-law earns. Will that suit you?"

Twelve-year-old Tao-ching looked with disgust at the pair she called her parents, and with tears in her eyes rode off silently in the ricksha.

Once in the high school, she felt like a bird freed from a cage, gulping in the sweet air of freedom. She liked to study and was especially fond of works of literature that helped to develop her fertile imagination or gave her a vision of a splendid future. She was brimming with bold ideals, and the more she read and studied the more active her mind became. Outwardly, however, she remained indifferent to her surroundings, being generally reticent and contemplative. Her best friend was a kind, warm-hearted girl called Chen Wei-ju, who never failed to sympathize with her in her difficulties, and upon whose genuine affection and help she could count.

It was 1931. Two months before Tao-ching was to graduate she came back one afternoon after a visit home and sat for a long time in the school-room in unusually low spirits. Her friends eyed her curiously.

"What did your mother call you home for, Tao-ching?" asked one of them. "What's happened to upset you so?"

Wei-ju tugged at her sleeve and patted her hair, quietly urging: "Tao-ching, tell me what's the matter?"

But her friend just sat there woodenly, not making a sound.

Some of the girls giggled and Tao-ching woke up with a start, rubbing her eyes and asking with a bitter smile, "What is there to laugh at? Stop teasing!" She then rose and left the room.

Soon afterwards Wei-ju went for a walk with her along the bank of a river near the school. The two girls set out, one just in front of the other along a narrow path. They had walked for some time when Tao-ching, who was ahead, turned round and stared fixedly at her companion.

Her face was unusually white. "I've got to give up my studies, Wei-ju! . . ."

"Why? Is that why your mother called you home, Tao-ching?" The kind-hearted Wei-ju sounded more disturbed and grieved than Tao-ching herself.

The latter did not answer, and they walked on to some trees by the river, where they stopped to lean against a weeping willow. Tao-ching stared absent-mindedly at the flashing gold of the stream, and after a long pause said half to herself:

"Our family is bankrupt. My father went to court over some property; but he lost his case and is ruined. Without a word to my stepmother, he sold all the land he owned outside the Great Wall and walked out, taking his concubine with him. I'm all the property left to my stepmother."

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* The scholar who passed highest in the final government examination.

"What do you mean? How can you call yourself property? You're not made of money!"

"My stepmother wants to make money out of me. She sent for me to persuade me to marry a wealthy old man so that she can go on living in ease and luxury. I refused — I've broken with her!"

On the verge of tears, Wei-ju grasped her friend's hand, saying, "What's to be done then?" Tao-ching quietly patted her hand and comforted her:

"Don't get excited, Wei-ju! I'm not going to give in. If the worst comes to the worst I'll kill myself!"

Soon after this, Hsu Feng-ying stopped Tao-ching's allowance, hoping by this means to force her into submission. But the girl remained firm. She thought of leaving school and finding a job, but the term had not yet ended and where could she go? Some warm-hearted schoolmates contributed enough money for her board, so that she was able to stay on for the last two months of the term.

When the holidays started, she could not but prepare to go home; and though her heart was heavy she had not lost hope. Much as she longed to enter a university, if her stepmother did not relent she would be unable to continue her studies. But would the hard-hearted woman change her mind?

She was in a quandary.

Tao-ching was as fond of music as she was of literature, and when she hired a ricksha to go home she took with her an assortment of instruments — a small reed-organ, a bamboo pipe, a flute, a moon-guitar and a two-stringed fiddle. Her precious Butterfly mouth-organ was in her pocket. No matter where she went, these instruments accompanied her, which was why her friends had given her two nicknames: a pleasant one, The Flute Fairy, and a not-so-pleasant one, The Music Shop. When alone, she would play one of her instruments,

and anyone who then caught a glimpse of her never failed to marvel at the true happiness in her eyes, which were generally so wistful. At such moments her gravity gave way to a childlike innocence. At least, this had been true six months before. Since the unexpected change in her position she had not felt much like playing, and some of the girls teased her:

"Has your music shop closed, Flute Fairy?"

She would give a faint smile and walk away without uttering a word.

As the ricksha jolted slowly along the rough road, her heart grew heavier and heavier. Her last scene with her stepmother was still fresh in her mind. Hsu Feng-ying had lashed out at her like a ruthless landlord flaying a luckless tenant, abusing her, reproaching her for ingratitude, and threatening to drive her away if she failed to obey. Trembling at the recollection, Tao-ching clutched her reed-organ close to her breast.

When she arrived home her stepmother was playing mahjong with some guests. And she was surprised at her affectionate welcome.

"So you're back, child!" Hsu Feng-ying smiled. "Did you have a hot journey? We've quite a few guests here today, as you can see, and they're all complimenting me on your good school record!"

Tao-ching thought, "Perhaps she won't force me to marry after all. Perhaps she will pay for me to go on studying." She had always believed in the adage, "Studying stands above all else," and asked for nothing better than the opportunity to continue her studies. So she bowed slightly to the guests, and although she hated the gamblers and opium-addicts whom her parents invited to the house, today they seemed less objectionable than usual, and she lingered by the mahjong table, smiling bashfully.

"This is Director Hu," said her stepmother, indicating the sallow, dissipated man in Western clothes in the seat of honour. "This is my daughter Tao-ching," she said with pride, smiling obsequiously from her puffy eyes. Tao-ching's heart contracted suddenly and she hurried to an inner room where she need not listen to any more of their talk.

Tao-ching settled down to life at home, and in due course took the entrance examinations to the Normal University. She did well, and was very happy. But the thoughts of the plot to marry her off and of life at home from time to time made her depressed. Every night the mahjong pieces would clatter till the small hours of the morning, and she could not close her ears to the maudlin flirtations and the whining decadent music, or the oaths of angry men who had lost their stakes at the gaming tables.

"How low mother has sunk without a husband and an income!" she thought as she noted how Hsu Feng-ying, now nearing fifty, made herself up and tried to attract the men. Tao-ching was bitterly distressed and disgusted.

A fortnight or so later, her stepmother was in a good humour and took her shopping, buying the girl a white muslin gown and a pair of white canvas shoes. She wanted to buy more stylish clothes, but Tao-ching would not hear of that, as she preferred a plain white gown and white shoes and stockings for summer wear, even if they made her resemble a nurse. Her stepmother, unable to dissuade her, had to give in to her. That evening she cooked some of Tao-ching's favourite dishes, and after supper bade the girl and her younger brother, Tao-feng, sit beside her for a pleasant chat. Suddenly she interrupted their inconsequential chatter to say:

"Tao-ching, your father, the old scoundrel, has deserted us and left us without a cent. All our land is gone and we three are alone. Your brother is still young, and you have no special skill. How are we to live?" There were tears in her eyes, and Tao-ching lowered her head in distress. To her surprise, Hsu Feng-ying said soothingly, "Be a good girl and don't lose heart. If you take my advice, we shall all have enough to live on and you'll be able to go on with your studies."

Tao-ching did not speak, and her stepmother, after biting her nails thoughtfully for a moment, continued: "By the way, tell me frankly what kind of husband you'd like."

A long time passed but there was no reply.

"Speak! I'm waiting for an answer."

"I've never given any thought to the question, mother. Didn't you say you would let me go on studying? Please don't talk about marriage again."

Frowning as she tried to hold back her mounting anger, Hsu Feng-ying protested:

"You're being most unreasonable. I married your father at the age of sixteen. Besides, marriage needn't interfere with your studies." She rose from the bed, screwed up her puffy eyes, and taking one of the girl's hands said with a laugh: "My dear, I've good news for you! Director Hu, who often comes here, has taken a fancy to you and admires your ability as well as your looks. He's never been married and he's still in his thirties. He's a man of wealth and influence, a wonderful match!"

Because Tao-ching bent her head and did not say a word, her stepmother assumed that she was willing but too bashful to speak. Hsu Feng-ying, very gratified, laughed heartily and expatiated on the advantages of such a marriage:

"If you agree, my love, there'll be no end to our good fortune. Director Hu has foreign-style houses in Nanking and Shanghai; he has a large bank account in Peiping and thousands of *mou* of land in his own district. Twelve thousand *mou* — think of it! In Shanghai he has plenty of shares that pay handsome dividends. He's close to Chiang Kai-shek, too, and trusted by him. Very soon he'll rise even higher in the official world. . . ."

Tao-ching could restrain herself no longer. Jerking free from her stepmother, she burst into tears.

"Don't, mother! Stop trying to arrange a match for me. I'd sooner die than become the plaything of any of those warlords and high officials. It's no use thinking I will marry one of them!"

Her stepmother, eyes glaring, jumped up in a rage. Her white, stringy hands clawed and trembled as though searching for something with which to strike the girl.

"You vile creature! So you think you're a fine lady, eh? Your low-class mother could only breed low-class brats. A beggarly bitch from a mountain cave, sold as a concubine or worse — what can you expect of any child of hers? You don't know what's good for you. You'd better do as I say, or I'll sell you to pay for all the rice you've eaten!"

Tao-ching, stunned by this outburst, stood as if rooted to the ground. She had known that her mother was dead and that she herself had suffered for being a stepchild. But the truth about her own mother had been kept from her.

"A beggarly bitch from a mountain cave, sold as a concubine or worse. . . ." This abuse on top of her misfortunes nearly broke her heart. She escaped to her room and sat there dazed for hours.

Before daylight, she tiptoed to Aunty Wang's room and caught hold of her thin arm.

"Tell me, aunty, what my mother was like! How — how did she die? Why have you always kept the truth from me?"

There was no answer, only silence in the dark, stuffy little room.

"Please tell me, aunty, please! . . . You've always been just like a mother to me. You must tell me!" Tao-ching put her arms around Aunty Wang and burst into tears.

"Poor child!" Aunty Wang hesitated as if to master her feelings, then continued brokenly: "Do you remember, when you were just a tot, I told you a story about a girl who went to cut firewood? Well, that girl was your mother!"

In her early years, the lonely, unhappy Tao-ching had often turned to Aunty Wang in the long winter evenings for one of the stories she could tell so movingly. And one of these stories was about Hsiu-ni. But because of strict instructions from her mistress, Aunty Wang had never revealed that the girl who had cut firewood and been forced to become the landlord's concubine was Tao-ching's mother. Now kind Aunty Wang could hold back the truth no longer and she told Tao-ching the whole story.

On the orders of Lin Po-tang and his wife, Hsiu-ni had been torn from her child, forced into a waiting car and sent as a gift to a friend of Lin Po-tang. She had rushed back like a mad woman to claim her daughter, but the gate of the house was bolted against her, and she could find no way in. She wandered frantically about, her hair dishevelled, eating and drinking nothing the whole day, running here and there and crying piteously:

"Give me back my child! Give her back! Have you no heart? No sense of right? You are worse than a wolf — you deserve to be hacked to pieces! Give me back my child! Oh, give her back to me. . . ."

Her anguished cries and heart-rending shrieks made many shed tears.

But Lin Po-tang, afraid for his reputation, had her tied up and then forcibly removed. Poor Hsiu-ni, driven distracted, was afterwards sent back to her old mountain home near the Paiho River. The first glimpse of her childhood haunts, the hills and streams so dear to her heart, restored her sanity and she began to utter a few intelligible words and weep. She might never see her child again, but she clung to the thought of reunion with her grandfather — the gentle, kindly old man who had relied as much on her as she did on him. When she reached home, however, the familiar pots and pans were still in their old places but she learned that her grandfather was gone. She could neither weep nor utter a word, and that same evening, driven beyond all endurance, young as she still was she too jumped into the river.

Tao-ching fell back on the narrow cot, as though unconscious. After a time, she struggled to raise herself and, laying icy fingers on Aunty Wang's thin hands, cried softly, "Mother! . . ." She wept as she had never wept before.

"Don't cry, child! If your stepmother hears you, there will be trouble!" But even as she urged Tao-ching to stop crying, the elder woman was wiping her own eyes.

Tao-ching suddenly sprang up. "I'm not afraid of them any more!" she cried. "I'm going to leave this house."

"Where will you go?" asked Aunty Wang, taken aback, still wiping her tears with a corner of her jacket.

"Back to school," said Tao-ching, though that was not her intention. "I'll stay at school a few days until I know whether I've been admitted to the Normal University."

"You'll go back to school? Good. Don't go running all over the place. A tiff between mother and daughter blows over quickly. Remember, child, 'A man who would pass under low eaves must bend his head!'" As the old woman voiced this proverb she struck a match and fumbled under her pillow. Tao-ching watched her in the half light of dawn, but before she could say what was on the tip of her tongue, Aunty Wang had a small paper package in her hands. Unwrapping it carefully, she told Tao-ching to strike another match, which showed a bundle of different coloured banknotes. Having counted them with the greatest care she placed the treasured hoard in Tao-ching's hands, saying huskily:

"This is the two months' wages your stepmother has just given me — ten yuan in all. Now, be a good girl and take this to pay for your board at school. Be patient, and if you need anything just tell me. Fate has treated you cruelly, both you and your mother!"

Tao-ching took the money, choking back her grief. "I had better go while they're still asleep. I. . . . Goodbye, aunty!"

Suddenly, in her mind's eye, the wrinkled old servant was transformed into a comely, distraught young woman with hair dishevelled and tears streaming down her face as she wailed in her despair: "Give me back my child! Give me back my child! . . ."

Chapter 3

Tao-ching did not go back to school, for it would have served no useful purpose. Inwardly vowing never again to cross the threshold of her hateful home, she went to find Wang Hsiao-yen, a good friend whom she had known since primary school. After spending three days with her, she took the train to Peitaiho to seek out her cousin Chang Wen-ching, a level-headed, honest young man whom she had respected from childhood. His wife was also an old school friend of hers, so that she could rely on their help. Just before the end of the term her cousin had written to say that they would be staying on at their school during the holidays; and two days before leaving for Peitaiho Tao-ching had sent them an express letter telling them she meant to visit them and giving particulars of her train from Peiping. It now seemed as if she had made the long journey for nothing — they had gone! Seated beside the lonely, silent old temple, she could not hold back her tears.

The moon glided noiselessly towards the south as the fresh sea breeze ruffled her hair and helped to clear her puzzled, heated brain. It was after midnight, time to stop weeping and to act. Looking up at the silent trees and the old temple with its gate closed fast, she rose slowly to her feet.

"Why don't I find the headmaster and ask him for news?" This idea brought fresh hope and she decided to try to find something to eat, for after fasting all day she was both hungry and thirsty. Leaving her luggage on the steps, she walked quickly down the path through the coppice.

With some difficulty she made her way to the village and entered a silent, seemingly deserted street. While she was wondering where the headmaster lived, a dark form approached. Relieved, she ran forward.

"Excuse me, can you tell me where the headmaster of the school lives?"

"The headmaster?" The man stopped short in surprise. "It's past midnight. Where have you come from?"

"I came to see my cousin Chang Wen-ching, who used to be a teacher in the village school. But it seems he's left, so I want to see the headmaster."

"So that's it!" The stranger smiled. "Well, as luck will have it, I'm the headmaster. May I ask your name?"

The speaker, a thin, short middle-aged man in a long gown, looked a typical village teacher. Tao-ching was so pleased that she hastened to ask: "Can you tell me, please, where my cousin and his wife have gone? The old man in the temple said they'd left."

"Mr. Chang and his wife? Ah, yes. . . ." He stopped to smile, revealing discoloured teeth. "It's most unfortunate that two days ago they both resigned to take up better posts — somewhere in the Northeast, I understand. . . . Well, you're not the first one to visit relatives and find them gone. I suppose you have nowhere to stay for the present? Never mind, tonight you can put up in our village. You must let me act as host in Mr. Chang's place."

Tao-ching was in a quandary, for she had not even got her fare back to Peiping. She felt too bewildered to speak. The chill night air and her luckless plight had drained all the colour from her face, and her legs trembled so that she could hardly stand.

The headmaster, sensing her distress, asked with a respectful smile:

"What is your name? . . . Miss Lin? Well, Miss Lin, don't stand on ceremony. You've come a long way to visit your relatives, and if you're in any difficulty, please let me know. Your cousin and I were colleagues, I will do my best to help you. I'm Yu Ching-tang, a native of this village."

Tao-ching had never been stranded like this before, and the headmaster's hospitality made her heart warm to him. Slightly reassured, she said:

"I came to see my cousin because. . . . I want to find a job. Have you a vacancy in your school for a teacher?"

This abrupt question took Yu Ching-tang by surprise and made him realize that he was dealing with an inexperienced girl.

"As for that . . ." He hesitated, then smiled, blinked his eyes and said, "That can be arranged, yes, indeed. You must stay in my humble house tonight, and we can talk about an appointment tomorrow. Something can be arranged; oh, yes, something can be arranged."

Tao-ching felt much relieved although Mr. Yu's rather vulgar, affected manner of speaking reminded her of one of the local gentry. But that did not matter. If she could find a job and somewhere to stay, she would be more than satisfied.

"Thank you, Mr. Yu! I needn't trouble you. If it's convenient, I can stay in the school."

"Good, good, good!" he agreed, and led her back to the temple.

Entering by a side door, he roused the drunken old gatekeeper and found Tao-ching a room in the staff dormitory. Then, blinking, he asked for news of recent happenings in Peiping and asked a number of questions about her family. Concealing the fact that she had run away, Tao-ching said that she had come to ask her cousin to find her a job as she could not afford to study. She said she would like to teach in a primary school.

"Ah, well, that can be arranged. Yes, indeed!" he assured her, continuing with a smile, "At present I have no vacancy on my staff; but you need not worry. I am going to Linyu soon to see Magistrate Pao, and I am sure that when I broach the matter to him there will be no difficulty whatsoever. The magistrate and I are on the best of terms. He takes a benevolent interest in young people — applying for a teaching post is a small request, and I am confident that it will be granted as soon as I mention the matter."

Tao-ching thought herself lucky to have met such a friend in time of need, and was delighted by the prospect of finding a job.

She slept soundly that night in the old, unfamiliar temple.

In her dreams the lapping of waves and the shrilling of cicadas were transmuted into lovely music.

Early the next morning she was awakened by the sound of the sea pounding against the rocks. The vigorous, rhythmic roar of the billows drew the romantic young girl irresistibly. Having hurriedly eaten the breakfast brought by the old doorkeeper, she went down to the beach.

The sea, the mysterious, majestic sea! Standing on the wet sand, her heart filled with happy excitement, Tao-ching gazed at the ocean. The sky above was clear except for a few white clouds on the horizon; the sea was as blue and clear as the sky, glimmering with the glorious sheen of silver brocade. Far out on the smooth, tranquil waters was a fleet of white-sailed fishing boats. The vastness and grandeur of nature eased the tension from which she had been suffering. She brushed back her wind-tossed hair, and took from her pocket her treasured mouth-organ.

Clouds are floating in the sky,
Stars are twinkling bright;
Out at sea the wind and tide
Are lulled to sleep tonight. . . .

Playing tunes learned in childhood, she strolled along the beach.

From time to time she stopped to pick up a beautifully coloured shell, now one to the left of her, now one to the right. Light-hearted as a child, she would drop to her knees and then jump up again to slip a new shell in her pocket, oblivious of the fact that her shoes were soaked and there was sand in her hair.

Yangchuang was a desolate seaside village, with little vegetation except for sparse grass on the sand dunes. But when she had walked a few *li* along the beach, she noticed a change. There were now green plantations, rows of fruit-laden apple and plum trees which covered the hillsides and valleys. The mimosa bushes were a mass of delicate, fragrant flowers. Between these verdant trees and fresh blossoms, and partly hidden by them, were groups of foreign-style houses and bungalows. Their bright multi-coloured roofs rising sharply between the trees close to the sea were a thrilling sight to Tao-ching, accustomed to the dusty streets of Peiping or the rugged mountains and poverty-stricken villages near Kupeikou where she used to go with her stepmother to collect rents. In the brilliant sunshine of this enchanting coast, the splendid villas which flashed into view were lovelier than anything she had imagined.

From the top of a small hill she gazed in silence for a while. Then, moved by youthful curiosity, she ran towards the rows of small red bathing-huts on the edge of the water.

Here, in this fairy-tale setting, she was disturbed by the clamour of human voices, the shouts and laughter of the swimmers now resting on the smooth, sandy beach. Some were yelling at the top of their voices, others talked affectedly and loudly. Suddenly she realized that she had strayed into a fashionable seaside resort.

Standing under an old pine tree, she curiously watched the people some distance away. There were groups of foreigners and well-to-do young Chinese in swimming suits of every kind and colour. Some were sunbathing on the beach, others spread their arms like white swans and plunged laughingly into the water. Those on the beach were mostly elderly foreign women and young Chinese matrons who lounged about under large beach parasols. Some of the women had small dogs with them. Seated on clean white sheets spread on the sand, they gossiped while enjoying the view. One woman poured a cup of milk into a white saucer, and offered it to a puppy. As Tao-ching watched, she heard a Chinese voice raised in anger, and turning in the direction of the sound saw an overdressed young woman, whose pearl ear-rings glistened in the sun. She was stamping her feet and scolding:

"Wait till I get my hands on her! She's been gone all this time and I am still waiting for the parasol. The sun is like fire! You slut, you'll pay for this!"

It was nearly noon, the hottest part of the day, and a girl in a tunic was hurrying across the scorching beach towards this termagant. The more she hurried the deeper she sank into the hot sand, while her mistress continued to stamp with rage and scream abuse. At last the girl, all out of breath, reached her destination and handed over a pink silk parasol. In return she received a hard slap on both cheeks. . . .

Tao-ching started back. She had been out all the morning. She was no longer as light-hearted as when she set out. The walk had been a new experience and she had enjoyed the beautiful scenery. She retraced her steps, humming, and stopping occasionally to pick wild flowers.

Startled by rough shouts, "Go back!" she raised her head and saw an impressive building surrounded by a massive wall towering before. A guard was glaring at her and pointing to a large wooden signboard near by.

Tao-ching, thoroughly annoyed, stopped, looked curiously in the direction indicated by the guard, and saw the notice:

OUT OF BOUNDS TO CHINESE AND DOGS

Only then did she notice fluttering in the breeze the stars and stripes on the tall flagstaff in front of this large house. She threw an angry look at the signboard, flagstaff and American flag, then flung away without a word.

"What kind of world is this? The way foreigners lord it over China. . . ." Choking with anger, she lost all desire to see more and decided to go straight back to Yangchuang Village.

The cliffs and sand threw back the glare and heat of the midday sun, and although the sea breeze afforded some relief she was uncomfortably hot. As she sat down on a rock to unwrap her shells and wipe her face with the handkerchief, she began to feel uneasy — instead of going to see Mr. Yu about her job she had acted like an irresponsible child and gone to the beach. She had never liked loitering about, even as a little girl, yet as soon as she came to Peitaiho she had fallen under the spell of the sea, and forgotten everything else. In a mood of self-reproach, she looked round. She had stopped on a bare, deserted dune, and the village in the distance did not seem to be Yangchuang. It had been easy to walk out of the village, but could she find the way back? Like most city-dwellers, she lost her bearings when in the open country, and now there was no one about to direct her.

"It doesn't matter. I'll keep straight on!" she consoled herself as she followed the undulating dunes. She was unafraid because she had managed alone from childhood. She walked briskly along until a huddle of grey tents came into view. Then she ran towards them, but there was no one inside. Outside them there were some nets and fishing tackle. A number of battered boats were overturned to dry. Evidently the tents belonged to some fishermen. Disappointed, she was looking about when she heard a cry from behind a nearby rock. She listened, startled for a moment, then hurried towards the sound.

A thin, sallow woman, no longer young, was sitting under a willow beside the large rock, suckling a sickly infant and mending a net. The baby whimpered after sucking for a few moments, but the mother did not stop her work; nor did she seem to notice when Tao-ching halted in front of her.

"Little wretch, you'll be the death of me yet! Stop crying!" she muttered hoarsely, frowning down at the child. "When I've nothing to eat, you have to go hungry too. Be good, now. . . ."

The child stopped sucking and cried more loudly. The baby was nothing but skin and bones because the thin, weakly mother had no milk. The woman lost patience with the howling child, and threw aside the net she was mending.

"Little wretch! D'you want to be the death of me? You'd be better dead like your poor wretched father! Ah, Heaven. . . ." She pressed her face against the infant and shook with sobs.

Tao-ching, who had come to ask the way, stood rooted to the ground. The woman was wearing a patchwork of dirty rags through which her shoulders and grimy knees were showing.

"I beg your pardon. Do you mind telling me. . . ." Tao-ching hesitated then softly urged, "Don't cry! You're crushing the child. . . ." At a loss for words, she longed to lift the matted head buried on the small chest. For the infant was so weak that after each howl it gasped for some moments, no sound issuing from its wide-open mouth.

The woman raised her head, looked at Tao-ching in bewilderment and stammered, "What . . . what do you want?" She had a Shantung accent and sounded afraid.

Forgetting to ask the way, Tao-ching uneasily inquired, "You don't belong here, do you? What's happened?"

The woman stared blankly back, seemed about to speak, thought better of it and resumed her mending. After a long interval she diffidently told her story.

"Our home is in Shantung. Times were so bad that my husband and I fled from famine. We were told we could make good money working for foreigners here, so the three of us came. In less than three months he . . . he was helping to build a house for the foreigners, when he . . . he had a fall and was killed!" She sat motionless, her lack-lustre eyes on Tao-ching, more pathetic in her immobility than if she had wept and wailed. "I can't go home now, so I beg and mend nets for the fishermen. . . ." Sensing that the girl standing before her did not mind her tatters or despise her poverty, she took a deep breath and said weakly as she rocked her baby, "I can't go on long like this, miss. And my baby hasn't long to live either. He's ill, poor mite, and I've no milk. If we'd known how it was going to be, we'd have chosen to die at home."

"It will be all right, you'll find a way out," muttered Tao-ching, as the picture of a puppy drinking milk from a saucer flashed into her mind. Her heart sank at the sight of the gaunt mother and her starving child whose life might flicker out at any moment.

"Better die and be done with it! Let the foreigners and the rich enjoy themselves! Are you here on holiday, miss? Look, what a good time they're having on the beach!"

"No, I'm not one of them!" Cut by the woman's words, Tao-ching hurried away, her mind a torment of conflicting impressions: the shabby tents, the undulating dunes, the roaring of the sea and rustling of the poplars, the puppy and parasols on the beach, the summer villas lovely as fairy mansions, and the notice "Out of Bounds to Chinese and Dogs" . . . .

Chapter 4

"So you're back, Miss Lin. Our humble village by the sea has magnificent scenery, hasn't it? You must enjoy all the views here."

Tao-ching had been met at the temple by Yu Ching-tang, who emerged from his room to greet her. His face was beaming, and even his eyelids, which never ceased to twitch, seemed to be laughing.

Before she could answer, he said: "I went to town early this morning to call on Magistrate Pao. He's an old school friend of mine, of excellent character and generally respected. Unfortunately he'd gone to the provincial capital for a conference, so I didn't see him. That doesn't matter, if you don't mind waiting here a few days. Everything will be easily settled on his return."

Tao-ching looked in silence at his thin, long face.

He hastened to explain:

"Please don't worry, or treat me as a stranger. Just wait here for a few days. You may not think it, but I'm a very sociable fellow!"

"I don't want to put you out, Mr. Yu," said Tao-ching. "If there's no opening here, I'll go back to Peiping." She was thoroughly worried — her cousin had gone, it was not easy to find a job and she had no money for her fare back to Peiping. In any case, what could she do there if she returned? . . . She stared at the shells on the table, sunk in thought.

"You mustn't on any account treat me as a stranger, Miss

Lin. When I go to Peiping, I'll be putting you to the same kind of trouble." Yu Ching-tang spoke so earnestly and cordially that Tao-ching was reassured and nodded her assent.

"Thank you! I hope Magistrate Pao comes back very soon."

"Of course, of course. He will be here soon. He won't be away long. Well now! You've been out a long time and not had your dinner, have you? It's waiting for you." He called to the gate-keeper: "Here, Old Kao! Bring Miss Lin's dinner!"

When the old man brought the food, Yu walked away, his back as curved as a bow. On the square table were steamed cakes of fine white flour and a dish of scrambled eggs; but the girl was so troubled that she had no appetite.

Before leaving Peiping, while staying with Wang Hsiao-yen, she had asked some of her teachers and closest friends to help her find a job, but a week passed with no word from them, and there was no definite news of Magistrate Pao either. She was beginning to be suspicious of Yu Ching-tang's protestations that all would be well.

"Please don't worry, Miss Lin! There will be no difficulty at all. The magistrate will be back very soon. . . . Excuse my asking — I hope you won't think me rude — but are you married, Miss Lin? Are you engaged? . . . Pardon me — just a casual question."

Every day the headmaster came once or twice to see her, and every time he harped tediously on the same subjects.

Tao-ching's suspicions were aroused and she wished she could leave the school. "Why is he keeping me here? He says he's going to find me a job, but why does he keep waiting for Magistrate Pao and wanting to know if I'm married or engaged?" There seemed to be no corner for her in all the wide world. She could do nothing but put up with things and stay on in Yangchuang Village, however futile and tiresome it was.

When ten days had passed there was still no response to her letters to Peiping asking for work there, and Magistrate Pao seemed no nearer to returning. Tao-ching became pale and grew more anxious as each day passed. She spent all her time on the beach to avoid Yu Ching-tang's constant chatting and became more and more fond of the sea.

She went to the shore immediately after breakfast each day, and found comfort in the deep blue of the boundless sea or a solitary white sail shimmering in the distance. Although the thrill of her first visit was never repeated, she still had a warm affection for the sea. She could sit all day and watch it whether it glimmered smooth and lovely as satin or blustered and tossed like some fierce wild beast. She was drawn to the sea as a child to its mother. Indeed, after fixing her melancholy gaze on the ocean, she sometimes bent her head and murmured, "Mother!" The image of Hsiu-ni had been constantly before her ever since Aunty Wang had told her of her mother's unhappy fate.

The girl in white who sat all day on the rocks aroused the curiosity of the peasants and children in that neighbourhood.

One day someone violated her solitude. It was dusk and she was brooding over the swirling ebb tide when a voice near by recalled her from her dreams.

"You ought to be going back for supper. Old Kao is waiting for you."

Tao-ching turned to see a dark, thin smiling young man standing beside her. She had seen him before on the beach, but this was the first time he had spoken to her.

She stared at him.

"Do go back to supper! Don't ruin your health by missing your meals," he repeated in a pleasant soothing voice. He had short hair parted on one side and wore a student's khaki uniform. His eyes, while not large, were bright and intelligent. It struck Tao-ching that he was not a villager; but after one glance and a murmured thanks, she turned and hurried away.

After that, she was often aware of his presence on the beach. Sometimes he approached as if eager to speak to her. Perhaps her distant manner silenced him, for he always ended by quietly walking by.

When she tired of sitting on the rocks, Tao-ching sometimes strolled along the beach. She returned several times to the part frequented by the holiday-makers, and walked past the enchanting villas. One day, as she neared the grey tents and the big willow by the rock, she remembered the woman who had mended nets there and wondered what had happened to her and the child.

The woman was not there, but two fishermen were cooking outside the tents; and walking over to them, she asked the elder one for news of the mother and child.

"Who?" he looked at her with astonishment. "There's no woman here. I don't know who you mean."

Tao-ching described the woman and her ailing child.

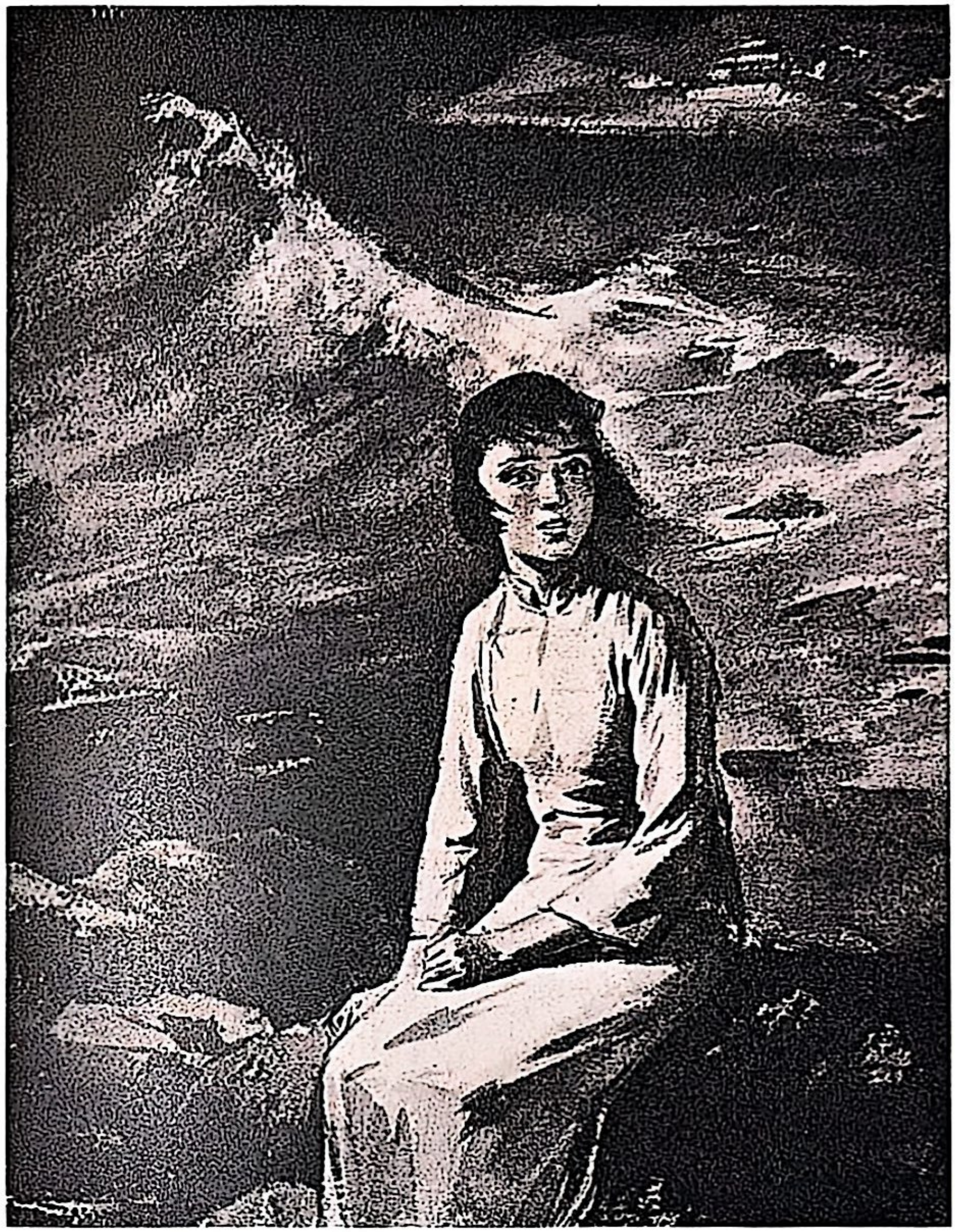
"Oh, that woman!" answered the old man, turning away from the fire towards Tao-ching. "She's gone. Jumped into the sea. . . . Best thing she could do, after all she went through, poor soul. Too bad about the child, though, a little boy too. Just a few days ago it was, she jumped into the sea, with her babe in her arms. . . . So now the whole family's finished."

Other fishermen, curious to know what was going on, had crowded round Tao-ching. It seemed strange to them that a girl student should interest herself in a poor, unfortunate woman. In distress and embarrassment she slipped away.

As she hurried along the soft beach, she had a vision of the woman's thin, sallow face and expressionless eyes, the whimpering, starving child in her arms, and her own mother crazy with grief as she screamed, "Give me back my child!" Her steps dragged and her heart ached but she plodded wearily on, longing to be home where she could lie down and rest.

"Hey, stop, little white dove!" There was a burst of offensive laughter near by and Tao-ching, raising her head, was amazed to see a group of young men lying naked in the sun. Heaped near them were handsome life-belts, fashionable swimming trunks, large, attractive parasols and bottles of wine.

As Tao-ching whirled round with a start to avoid them another voice called out:



"Nurse! Pretty nurse in white, do come here! We're tired and need a massage!"

These words, followed by a hoot of laughter, made Tao-ching aware that she was their butt — no other woman in sight was wearing white. She threw back her shoulders and walked indignantly towards them, and stopped a dozen steps away from them, biting her lips and frowning. The effect of her uncompromising defiance was like that of a squall of rain upon cicadas — the young men were struck dumb. After glaring at them for a minute, she turned without haste or confusion and walked away.

She had taken a few steps when raucous laughter broke out again behind her.

"Not bashful, is she?"

"Was she looking daggers!"

"Our little white dove has turned into a vicious owl!"

This time Tao-ching ignored them. Pulling out her handkerchief, she dabbed at the tears welling up in her eyes.

It was growing dark as she drew near the village, and the sky was overcast. She sank exhausted on the beach and once more stared out to sea. A storm was brewing and huge angry waves seemed inky black, as they thundered and pounded up the beach like ten thousand galloping horses. Her heart reflected the gloom of the stormy sea. Bending over the damp beach and thinking of her recent humiliation, she slowly wrote these words in the sand:

Beauty of mountains and river fills my eyes,
Yet my clothes are wet with tears;
Gone so soon wealth, fame and splendour!
Mark how, year after year by the Fenho River,
There is nothing but the flight of wild geese in autumn.

"It's a Tang poem, isn't it?" Someone had come quietly up behind her. She turned to see the dark young man looking at her with an appreciative smile. "Do you like poetry? Do you write yourself? The whole coast here is like a poem."

Unaccountably, Tao-ching blushed. She rose quickly, patted the sand from her hair and answered in a low voice, "No, I can't write poetry." She was moving away when the young man stopped her and warned, "It's going to rain. You'd better go back. Why do you spend all your time on the beach?"

"Never mind, thank you!" Hardly knowing what she said, she turned coldly away and hurried off.

Great dark clouds were scudding overhead, racing forward with the east wind. The surging waves were black as pitch, and a gusty wind was threatening a heavy downpour. But strangely enough, once Tao-ching had evaded the young man, she slowed down. The beach was about a *li* from the school, and she had reached the far side of the coppice when the sky turned utterly dark and the rain poured down. Then she broke into a run and was soon at the temple. In her haste she took the wrong way in the darkness and used the side entrance to a courtyard reserved for the village administration. As she was already inside, she decided to wait until the worst of the downpour was over. The east room was brightly lit, and she could hear the clatter of mahjong pieces as she stood on the porch outside, panting for breath and smoothing back her dripping hair. Suddenly she heard a coarse laugh, and a gruff voice inside the room said:

"Well, Old Yu, what are you keeping the girl here for? Aren't you afraid Mrs. Yu will be jealous if this goes on?"

"A nice-looking girl and a high school graduate too. Old Yu certainly has an eye for what's good!"

The men's loud laughter and the rattle of the mahjong pieces mingled with the sound of the storm, making Tao-ching shiver. Pressing against the wall, she looked into the room. There was Yu Ching-tang, blinking as usual, playing mahjong with three of the village gentry. A fat man with a gross face and big ears, wearing horn-rimmed glasses, pointed his finger at Yu and smacked his thick lips.

"Old Yu, will you let me have the girl? If so, that shop of mine in town is yours. . . . Don't think because I have two concubines that I don't want a girl with a modern education."

Tao-ching pressed more closely to the wall, clenching her teeth and holding her breath as she listened.

"Aha, you like to have your joke, friends. I assure you, I've no designs on the girl at all." Yu Ching-tang was speaking half in jest and half in earnest. "We are all like brothers, so I can tell you confidentially that Magistrate Pao asked me some time ago to find a good-looking girl student for him. He naturally wants something better than that jaundiced, countrified wife of his. When this girl Lin, obviously in trouble, came looking for her cousin, I took pity on her and asked her to stay for a while. . . ."

The three others had stopped moving the mahjong pieces, the better to hear Yu Ching-tang's unctuous explanation. "Unfortunately Magistrate Pao went to the provincial capital for a conference and has not yet returned. The girl has been pressing me for a job. Well, a job for a girl is easy to find — if only she has a pretty face!" he sniggered. "Yes, a job is easy to find!"

The fat man slapped Yu on the back, his eyes mere slits as he begged with a smile:

"If the magistrate doesn't want her, you must let me have her, Old Yu! After all, life is short. I'd give all my property for a chance like this."

. . . .

Somehow Tao-ching stumbled back through the pelting rain and black night to her room. In total darkness, her light dress wet through, she fell face down on the bed, too stricken to move. For a long time she lay there without a sound, her mind a blank.

Outside there was torrential rain, the angry sea was roaring, and the whole universe seemed lashed into a wild frenzy. Yet Tao-ching heard nothing of all this.

She gradually regained enough self-possession to think back over the happenings of the last fortnight. Why had life treated her so cruelly? She had mustered all her courage to escape from a home so evil and corrupt that it threatened to destroy her, only to find herself in a society even more evil and corrupt

— its bloody jaws were gaping to swallow her up. There seemed no way out for young people with ideals who refused to compromise. Was there no place in the whole wide world for an eighteen-year-old girl like herself?

Late that night she dragged herself up to light the lamp, and saw three letters on the table. With trembling hands she opened them. The first was from Wang Hsiao-yen, and these few lines stood out:

> . . . I have good news for you: you have passed the entrance examination to the Normal University, passed high on the list. But there's some bad news too: your step-mother owed a lot of money to a Mr. Hu and, when you disappeared, he turned nasty; so she's gone into hiding. That being so, I think you'd better not come back just yet. . . .

"Better not come back," murmured Tao-ching.

The second letter was from Chen Wei-ju, who had also tried unsuccessfully to find a job for her friend. She wrote:

> Dear Tao-ching,
>
> It's certainly not easy to find a job! I went to quite a few places to make inquiries, explaining your difficulties and the work you'd like. But a lot of people just sneered at me, and even my father's against me. . . . What's to be done, my dear? Why don't you come back? We can try again when you're here. . . .

"We can try again when you're here." In the dim lamplight Tao-ching's face turned whiter than ever, and she could not stop trembling. Hunger, cold and the series of shocks were overwhelming her. She sat there in a daze, unable to move the two letters in her hand and lacking the courage to open the third. Life had meted out nothing but savage blows to her; it was too much to expect that it might offer her happiness or warmth. The third letter could contain even more fearful news.

The rain continued to come down in torrents, lightning rent the darkness and deafening thunder followed, roll upon roll. Tao-ching occupied an inner room in the wing, and in the outer room there stood a coffin belonging to a wealthy family resident in the village. Towards midnight her lamp burned out, the light flickered and the room was plunged into darkness. Tao-ching's head was heavy and she was too dizzy to think coherently. A flash of lightning lit up the black, gleaming coffin, her heart missed a beat and then began to pound wildly.

"Mother! Save your child! . . ."

Weeping, she collapsed by the coffin and lay there for a long time without a sound.

When she recovered, a fearful idea made her heart contract and then beat violently. . . . She jumped up and rushed out. Through the storm and darkness she ran straight from the temple to the shore.

The inky, surging waves were a terrifying sight, but less to be dreaded than the wicked world of men. She ran to the edge of the water, to throw herself into the roaring, leaping waves.

Chapter 5

The night was black. The sea was breaking angrily on the rocks with a fearful and dismal roar. Just as Tao-ching was about to throw herself into the sea, a pair of warm arms seized her and a low voice sounded in her ears:

"Don't! . . . You mustn't! Try to find some other way out!" Her rescuer, a young man, was shuddering with cold. The rainwater was rushing down as if to wash them into the ocean, and he could barely support her.

It was all a nightmare to Tao-ching — why had she wanted to die? Who had saved her? Too spent and confused to be able to answer these questions, she drew away from the stranger and again fell exhausted on the sand.

"You'd better go back. It's pouring with rain, and cold. . . . Come on."

His young, eager voice came to her as if in a dream.

After a few seconds she felt a little easier and turned to look at the stranger, and a flash of lightning revealed the dark, thin face and bright, anxious eyes of the young man often seen on the beach. Earlier that evening he had spoken to her, asking her some questions about poetry.

"It's him. . . ." His warm-hearted encouragement made all thought of death melt away like snow in the spring. She slowly sat up, rain dripping from her hair and chilled to the bone. Shivering uncontrollably, teeth chattering, she struggled to her feet.

"It's too cold for you here," said the young man. "Let me take you back."

She could not utter a word in reply. Silently, in the slackening wind and rain, she walked beside him back to the school.

They entered the wing where Tao-ching was staying. She could see that he knew the old temple by the way he went to fetch a lamp from another room. He carefully stood the lamp on the table, hesitated for a moment, looked at her and whispered:

"You must change your clothes, I'll be back presently."

Tao-ching had become as tractable as a child. She quickly changed into dry clothes. By the time she had drunk a little water he was back. Though he still wore his wet student's uniform his face was radiant as he paused at the door, nodded formally and introduced himself:

"You don't know me, but I've known who you were ever since you arrived. You're Lin Tao-ching, aren't you? My name is Yu Yung-tse. I was born in this village. Yu Ching-tang, the headmaster of the primary school, is my cousin. I'm studying at Peking University. . . . You had a narrow escape just now, Lin. . . ." Having said this like reciting a part in a play, he sat down in the arm-chair beside the table.

Tao-ching, head lowered, also sat by the table like someone

exhausted after a serious illness. Presently she looked up shyly and whispered:

"Thank you! If not for you. . . . But I've nothing to live for. . . ." She hung her head and said no more.

Yung-tse stepped to her side and after a few moments of silence asked:

"Won't you tell me what's troubling you? I shall be only too glad to help if I can be of any use."

The rain had dwindled to a mere drizzle. The lamp shed a pallid light in the cool damp air. Tao-ching roused herself with a smile.

"Of course I'll tell you. I can see you're quite different from your cousin Yu Ching-tang."

To meet someone sympathetic in time of trouble and danger, especially someone who saves your life, is like coming upon an old friend in a strange country. The girl frankly told him her story, pouring out her heart without reserve, not even omitting what she had overheard of Yu Ching-tang's conversation with his friends. When she reached the end of her story, her big melancholy eyes burned with a hard, bright flame, surprising in one so quiet and self-contained.

"I hate them! I hate the whole world — this society, my home and myself. . . . I don't want to fritter my life away — but there's no way out for me."

"I see! Even before you told me, I had a good idea what your troubles might be." Yung-tse nodded and looked into her eyes with an understanding smile. "As soon as you came to our village I could see from your expression and manner, from the fact that you spent all day down on the beach, that something tragic had happened to you. We had no chance to speak to each other, though." He glanced at her uncertainly and paused. "I don't know if you noticed, but I was so worried something might happen to you that I often followed you at a distance. I couldn't set my mind at rest, so I came to the room opposite. This evening, when I saw you run out of the village administrative office looking so desperate, I again followed you." He smiled, and his eyes flashed as he stopped speaking.

This was a revelation to Tao-ching. She had been vaguely conscious of a shadowy figure hovering near her ever since she had been in Peitaiho. "So he has been watching over me all the time," she thought as she stole a look at him and blushed.

"Lin. . . ." He faltered, wondering how to address her, but could find nothing more appropriate than her surname. "What are you planning to do? You must know how I . . . sympathize. . . ."

"I shall have to leave because Yu Ching-tang is so vile."

"Where will you go?" he asked.

Looking him straight in his anxious eyes, she answered candidly:

"I don't know! I may wander from place to place. The whole world's my home now."

"You can't do that!" Yung-tse sat down in the chair opposite, shaking his head vigorously. "Crows are black the world over. It may be dark and squalid here, but other places are no better. A young girl like you mustn't run such risks."

"What do you think I should do, then?" Tao-ching asked. This young man who had suddenly entered her life won her respect and trust just like the hero of some old romance.

"Lin. . . . Don't stand on ceremony. We're already like old friends. Yu Ching-tang will be no problem because my father is a powerful man in this village — after serving outside as a district magistrate he's come here to retire. Ching-tang will listen to him. My father knows Magistrate Pao too. I can speak to my father and to Ching-tang so that they won't make any trouble for you. As for that scheme of Ching-tang's, don't worry, that was just wild talk. Your cousin's departure has left the school short-handed. Why don't you stay on and teach here? Wouldn't that be better?"

Tao-ching had listened quietly, thinking that this university student was not only kind and warm-hearted, but capable too. But she frowned and shook her head.

"No!" she cried with childish stubbornness. "I don't want anything to do with such a despicable character as Yu Ching-tang. I would rather starve than bow low for five *tou* of rice."*

"You can't call this bowing low. Ching-tang is a man of some education." Yung-tse smiled persuasively.

But Tao-ching interrupted:

"I don't think much of his education then! It's unpleasant even to be near such a man."

Yung-tse stared in surprise at the pale, lovely face before him. What determination this slip of a girl showed in her wilful, naive pursuit of an unattainable ibeal! He wanted to convince her of her mistake, but was deterred by her look of stubborn resolution. They faced each other in silence.

The cocks were beginning to crow and it would soon be dawn. Tao-ching, her mind in a turmoil and unwilling to say more, rested her weary head on the table, Yung-tse walked to the window. The rain had stopped and the day promised to be fine. In the glimmering dawn he again stood quietly beside her for a few minutes and then said:

"I'm going now. You ought to get some sleep. If you see Yu Ching-tang, on no account reveal that you know about his scheme. Don't mention what we've been discussing either. . . . You can't go away just yet. We'll discuss what's to be done later. I know how you love the sea. Let's go to the beach this afternoon for a talk, shall we?"

Tao-ching rose, nodding as she did so. When Yung-tse turned in the doorway to look back, their eyes met and both of them flushed deeply.

Towards dusk a smiling sea gently lapped the shore, breaking into white foam as it reached the soft, sandy beach. Sea-gulls soaring below a few evening clouds uttered occasional cries. In the setting sun Tao-ching and Yung-tse sat on a crag facing the sea. She was gazing pensively at the sparkling, golden waves, while Yung-tse scanned the pale distant horizon where water and clouds met. From time to time he turned his head to steal a glance at her, and presently, breaking the silence, he proved to have a ready tongue.

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* Five *tou* of rice, the equivalent of five pecks, was the salary of a small official in ancient China. The reference is to Tao Yuan-ming, a Tsin Dynasty poet (365-427) who preferred to live simply on his farm rather than submit to the authorities.

"Lin . . . I hope you'll feel able to trust me. Although we have only met by chance, I can see you are a very remarkable girl with a clear purpose in life. So from the bottom of my heart. . . . My sympathy and respect for you make me put your welfare before everything else. . . . Do stay here for a while! No one will dare to insult or molest you I give you my word of honour. Yu Ching-tang has already agreed to your teaching here. I'm sure you'll make a splendid third-form mistress. What do you say?"

Tao-ching raised her head and looked with melancholy eyes at Yung-tse's dark face.

"Thank you," she said. ". . . I often think of Gorky's words: Our greatest, most glorious task in life is to be a man. To uphold human dignity, I'm not willing to fritter my life away." Her voice gained in strength as she spoke, and she grew so animated that Yung-tse was surprised at the shy, reserved girl's determination to meet and overcome all difficulties. "If I'd wanted the luxuries of life I'd long ago have become some rich man's concubine and a fashionable society lady. I wouldn't then have been in this fix, forced to fend for myself as best I can. The kind of life I've turned my back on has no spiritual value at all. It's a living death!"

He stared at her, too amazed to speak, and both were silent again. After some time, Yung-tse broached another subject.

"You like literature, don't you? You must have read a good deal."

"I love books, but I haven't read very many. . . . I haven't yet asked what you are studying at Peking University."

"I'm in the Chinese Literature Department. It seems we have the same tastes."

Having found a good topic, Yung-tse held forth at some length on literature and art. He spoke of Tolstoy's *War and Peace,* Hugo's *Les Misérables, La Dame aux camélias* by Dumas fils, and the poetry of Heine and Byron; then of Chinese writers like Tsao Hsueh-chin, Tu Fu and Lu Hsun. His reading was clearly extensive, his memory excellent. Tao-ching listened wide-eyed to the beautiful, stirring words that fell from his lips, as he told of characters and tales of high romance. She gradually became enraptured and delight shone on her face. Finally he brought the conversation back to her. "Lin, you must know Ibsen's *A Doll's House.* Have you read *Breaking Away* by Feng Yuan-chun?* The main theme of both is the struggle against outworn tradition and for the independence of women. But I think you are even braver and more determined than their heroines. You are eighteen, aren't you, Lin? I am sure you will go far, you are so fine. . . ." His carefully measured flood of words held Tao-ching fascinated.

The new moon had risen above the horizon, and the deserted beach had long been silent but for the pounding of the waves against the rocks. Still the two young people lingered by the sea to talk. Tao-ching's heart slowly filled with the hopefulness of youth, and the happiness of one who has found fresh hope when all seemed utterly lost. She was deeply grateful to Yung-tse for saving her life and for his sympathy, she also respected him because he shared her ambitions and outlook on life. In one short day she had come to look upon him as the hero of her dreams.

They met again on the beach at dusk next day.

When the moon rose they were still strolling by the sea.

A gentle wind was sweeping wisps of dark clouds towards the horizon as Tao-ching and Yung-tse sat down on a promontory to rest. Once more Yung-tse talked about literature, gazing intently at Tao-ching as he did so until he lost the thread of his discourse. Tao-ching, who had been hanging on his words, lowered her head in embarrassment as she suddenly realized that he had stopped to stare at her.

Yung-tse seized on a new subject to cover his confusion.

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* A well-known Chinese woman writer of the late twenties.

"Do you remember Heine's poetry, Lin? I have loved this great German poet since my high-school days and know quite a few of his poems by heart — especially those about the sea."

Tao-ching heard her own unsteady voice as if in a dream, "Can you still recite them?"

Yung-tse nodded and began to recite in low, passionate tones:

Hazy twilight is approaching,
The tide runs stronger,
As I sit on the shore watching the snow-white waves,
My heart surges like the mighty ocean.
A deep longing for home makes me think of you,
Your beautiful image is everywhere around me,
Calling me always.
It is always present,
In the sound of the wind, the roar of the sea,
In the sigh from my breast.

I write it in the sand with a fine reed pipe:
"Agnes, I love you."

. . . .

Yung-tse came to a sudden stop. He had seemed to be pouring out his own heart rather than reciting a poem. Under his burning gaze, Tao-ching turned her head in confusion. A secret surge of happiness made her forget all her troubles and bitterness of soul in the fascination of an imaginary world which she could not wholly understand. As they walked slowly back to the village along the moonlit beach, Yung-tse said softly:

"Lin, stay on in this village! Don't run away! Look how beautiful it is here by the sea!"

Tao-ching, innocent and trustful, promised not to leave.

A few days later the autumn term opened at the primary school, and Tao-ching saw Yung-tse off to Peiping to continue his studies.

The morning he was to leave, they waited in the small deserted station for a train from the east, and as the train was not yet due, they decided to stroll across a nearby plot of land.

Although they had only been friends for a few days and had talked in a general way on the beach about art, life and society, at this moment of separation they both felt an indescribable reluctance to part. Tao-ching felt something of the grief and panic of a child being taken away from its mother. Thanks to Yung-tse's influence, Yu Ching-tang had abandoned his dastardly plan; but she feared that she would be helpless and alone again when her new friend left.

After strolling for some time, they came to a standstill.

The sight of Tao-ching's melancholy eyes and thick bobbed hair ruffled by the autumn breeze made Yung-tse's heart beat faster. He had fallen in love at first sight with this beautiful girl, but shrewdness and caution warned him that to speak too soon might spoil their friendship. He had held himself in check and talked only of subjects likely to please Tao-ching. Now the knowledge of her feelings for him and her complete candour tempted him to pour out his heart. Mindful that a wrong approach might ruin his chance of success, he hesitated, gazing at the white-clad figure beside him, his heart afire with the thought:

"This innocent girl as lovely as mimosa — if only she were mine!"

When Tao-ching turned and saw the ardour in his eyes, a fresh wave of emotion set her blood racing and she hurriedly bent down to pick a wild flower. When she looked at him again the young man was smiling calmly as if all were as usual. He turned towards the station and said:

"You had better go back. The train will soon be in."

Tao-ching tossed her head with a childlike smile. "No, I shan't leave till the train has pulled out."

As they waited on the platform, Yung-tse earnestly advised her:

"I hope you'll be patient, no matter what Ching-tang says. He won't make any trouble for you because . . ." he smiled at Tao-ching — "because I told him you and I have become good friends. That's right, isn't it?"

"Whether we have or not, why tell him?"

"It's better this way. Then he can look after you."

"I'm not a child. I'm earning my own living, I don't need him to look after me."

Afraid she had taken offence, Yung-tse looked fondly into her eyes and softly said:

"Don't be so impatient, Lin! During the last few days I've been to some trouble. . . to smooth things out for you . . . for you, yes! Well, let's not talk about that. But in this society of ours, 'It's easy to be an official if you have friends at court.' If Ching-tang knows we are friends, that's all to the good. You mustn't take these things too seriously."

With lowered head Tao-ching answered:

"At any rate, I'd rather starve than try to get on the good side of him!"

Yung-tse stopped arguing and thought: "What a headstrong young girl!" He dared not pursue the matter.

The train pulled into the station, and Tao-ching watched him get aboard. Above the heads of the noisy crowd she saw him standing sadly at the door of the carriage. He was still staring fixedly yet absently at her when the train began to move.

After the train had gone and the crowd had dispersed, Tao-ching remained standing motionless on the platform, lost in thought. To her he was a great-hearted knight and a brilliant young scholar!

Chapter 6

So Tao-ching took up her duties in the Yangchuang Village Primary School. Now that she was at last self-supporting, her troubled mind began to find peace and soon she was absorbed in her teaching and her pupils. The only fly in the ointment was the presence of Yu Ching-tang. The sight of his long yellow face with its hypocritical smile and twitching, snake-like eyelids filled her with revulsion.

The school children told Tao-ching that her cousin Chang Wen-ching had been dismissed because he disapproved of the headmaster's interference with the teachers. Yu was a big landlord in the village, a prominent member of the local gentry and a favourite with the county magistrate. They called him "The Smiling Tiger". Still, he was invariably polite to Tao-ching. Whenever he met her he would gush with delight and greet her with a smile.

"You are exceedingly busy, aren't you, Miss Lin? Our humble school is very poorly equipped. I'm afraid it's not fair to you, not fair to you!"

Tao-ching would nod coldly, unable to bring herself to speak to him.

But Yu's face remained creased in a smile, and his quizzical glance as he nodded and gushed did remind her of a smiling tiger.

One day Tao-ching met him at the top of the temple steps. With a leer he thrust his face close to her, so close that his nose nearly touched her. Then he said:

"Congratulations, Miss Lin! Yung-tse's wife has just died. Luck is certainly with you — now you can take it easy. . . ."

Tao-ching recoiled quickly and indignantly. "What's that? I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, nothing, nothing. Yung-tse's wife has just died, that's all. The broken-down cart blocking the way is gone. The dying wife no sooner draws her last breath than the matchmaker comes to the door with a new proposal. That's the custom in our humble county. But . . . but think nothing of it."

With this, he walked away chuckling to himself.

Tao-ching went to her room in a rage and sat motionless for a long time, her head resting on the table.

Two days later, when the afternoon classes were over and some of the teachers were sitting chatting in the staff room, Yu came in muttering angrily under his breath. He had a bundle of letters in his hand, and seeing Tao-ching reading a newspaper, he went up to her, cleared his throat and said, "Miss Lin, your letter! The post office will soon have to move into our school. Look, what a large correspondence you have!"

Before Tao-ching could get up, he waved the letters over his head and turned to her colleagues with a laugh. "Miss Lin should open a post office for herself. Her letters arrive in shoals. She has more letters than all the rest of the village put together." This said, his expression changed and, blinking and pulling a long face, he sawed the air with the letters, hissing, "I must warn you, Miss Lin, that there has been talk about you in the village for some time. Do you understand? A teacher must consider public morals. The relations between men and women. . . ."

Tao-ching snatched the letters from his hand and angrily interrupted, "Mr. Yu! I came here to teach, not to listen to your preaching! I am a teacher, free to do as I see fit." And without looking back she ran to her room, threw herself on the bed and buried her face.

At dusk she regained sufficient composure to light the lamp and read her letters. There were about a dozen, most of them from Yu Yung-tse. The university student was evidently head over heels in love, for every day he wrote to her — sometimes three times a day — letters burning with passionate ardour. The village postman made delivery only every few days, so a number of letters arrived together. This had given Yu Ching-tang a weapon to wield against her. He had not only contemplated presenting Tao-ching to Magistrate Pao but was hoping to get some favours for himself, and he was not at all pleased with Yung-tse's interference in his plan. Just as he was about to pluck the peach, a quick hand had reached out and seized it. He could not help feeling annoyed, but he dared not offend Yung-tse's father or the young man himself, for as a university student his cousin was highly respected in the village and might become an important official in the future. So he transferred his displeasure to Tao-ching for the homeless, helpless young girl was in his power.

In the dim light of the paraffin lamp, Tao-ching read Yung-tse's ardent yet tender letters, and a smile dawned on her face. Stirred by his outpouring of sweet sentiments which were mingled with fiery yet restrained avowals, her young heart was full of love. Her weariness forgotten, she picked up her pen to write a long reply. A passage in that letter read less like the reflections of a naive young girl than those of a grown woman with more than her share of the sorrows and misfortunes of life.

> Yung-tse, how I long to destroy this wicked, hateful society, but I am like a small insect caught in a spider's web. No matter how hard I struggle I can't get away from all the horrors around me. . . . I ran away from home to escape ill-treatment; but the whole of society is just as corrupt as my own home, as revoltingly wicked. I find that your cousin and my father are birds of a feather: all their talk is of humanity, justice and morality, while in their hearts there is nothing but greed and lust. I feel like a beast of burden stumbling through a trackless desert alone. . . . Oh, Yung-tse, shall I ever see an oasis? Shall I ever find the cool refreshing spring for which I long?
>
> I want to tell you something. You accuse me of lacking in warmth, of being too cold to you. Well, from now on I promise to love you, to love you dearly. If you only knew how heavy my heart is today! I cannot stand this humiliating treatment. I want to run away . . . but where can I go? . . . I love you with all my heart.

It was very late, and she was so tired that she could hardly keep her eyes open. She finished the letter and, without rereading it, flung herself fully dressed on to the bed and fell asleep with her lover's letters clasped in her hand.

To Tao-ching's sorrowing mind, the village, the daily round, and even the beautiful majestic sea, by degrees lost colour and meaning. Her letters to Yu Yung-tse and Wang Hsiao-yen became filled with pessimism and despair. They urged her not to be discouraged but to take a happier view of life. She was sometimes startled to find herself subject to such unhealthy fits of depression. But life — all that she had seen of it — was so dark and cruel that not even the first flush of her love for Yung-tse could overcome her dejection.

One day, however, something happened to awaken the sleepy little village and Tao-ching was aroused from her apathy and frustration.

September 24, 1931, was an unforgettable day. It was the day when the train coming through the Shanhaikuan Pass from beyond the Great Wall brought coach-loads of refugees, weeping and in great distress. The people of Yangchuang Village near Peitaiho Station were startled out of their complacency when they learned that the Japanese navy had occupied Chinwangtao on the nearby coast. Yangchuang Village was thrown into a ferment. Men, women and children fleeing from Chinwangtao and the neighbouring countryside crowded the village streets striking fear into the hearts of the local people. Classes stopped, the teachers who lived in neighbouring villages went to their homes, those resident in the village stopped coming to school. Only Tao-ching was left in the deserted temple.

One afternoon she was sitting alone in the staff room, the westering autumn sun was gleaming faintly on the gourd vine covering the arbour outside the east windows and casting flickering shadows on the faded window paper. She was trying to read a novel but could not concentrate, and her thoughts turned to the chaos and misery in the streets, and to Chinwangtao, only twenty *li* away, already occupied by the Japanese navy.

The school porter brought in a newspaper. He was muttering to himself, and when he saw Tao-ching he cried, "Miss Lin, this is the end! The Japs have taken our three northeastern provinces!"

Dumbfounded, Tao-ching almost snatched the paper from him. It was true! Big, angry headlines announced that the Japanese army had occupied Shenyang and other cities in the northeast. She sank on to a stool, the newspaper clenched in her hand.

There was not a sound in the temple or the staff room; the whole world seemed wrapped in a sudden fearful stillness. The silence was broken by someone asking:

"Miss Lin, what's the news? What are the latest developments?"

Tao-ching, startled, raised her head. The old janitor had gone and before her stood Li Chih-ting, a teacher about forty years old. He had come in quietly and his questions were prompted by the sight of Tao-ching sitting there as if stunned, with the newspaper in her hand.

She rose and handed him the paper. Her eyes, usually so clear, were red and clouded.

Li took the paper, read a few lines of the first item, shook his head and sighed.

"This is terrible! Why, our country is on the verge of utter defeat! We're being destroyed! This is the end of China!"

Tao-ching, generally so quiet, cut him short saying tearfully, "Don't say that, Mr. Li! I can't bear to hear you! I don't believe China can ever be destroyed. 'The fortunes of a country depend on the people in it.' How can we let it be destroyed?"

While Tao-ching was speaking, firm, heavy footsteps sounded outside and a young man walked in. He stopped by the door, nodded to her informally, smiled, and said:

"You are absolutely right. The fortunes of a country depend on the whole people. Are you a teacher here?"

"Yes, I am," she answered, looking at Li Chih-ting in surprise, as if to ask what this forthright young man was doing there.

"Let me introduce you," Li said with a smile. "This is my brother-in-law, Lu Chia-chuan, a student of Peking University. He has come to see his mother, who's ill, and his sister. He's been on the go from the first moment he arrived, making me show him around. This is Miss Lin Tao-ching, one of my colleagues. She studied in Peiping too."

"Splendid!" The young man smiled. "It's not often we find a Peiping student teaching in a village school. . . . Do sit down. The Japanese invasion is creating a very serious situation. Don't you agree?"

This young man had a striking personality and Tao-ching was so attracted by his lively way of talking and his buoyant manner that she shed her usual reserve and asked him, "Where are you from? You know Japan has occupied the three northeastern provinces. Do you think China will fight?"

Smiling slightly, the young man seemed in no hurry to reply. His intelligent, pleasant eyes rested reflectively on the two faces before him, as if he were biding his time.

Li Chih-ting, smoking a cigarette and quietly waiting for Lu Chia-chuan to answer, explained to Tao-ching:

"You know, Miss Lin, this brother-in-law of mine is so interested in politics that once he starts talking about Chinese or foreign affairs, ancient or modern, there's no stopping him. . . . Well, Chia-chuan, talk away. You can see how worried Miss Lin is about the fate of our country."

"Do tell us what's happening, Mr. Lu," she urged him.

"I don't know any more than is in the papers." Lu Chia-chuan glanced through the papers on the table before looking up. "One thing is evident," he said slowly. "Chiang Kai-shek is 'bold' enough when it comes to civil war, but very timid when he has to face the real enemy. He has ordered hundreds of thousands of our troops in the northeast not to resist the invaders. So Japan, without firing a single shot, has taken the largest arsenal in the country — that at Shenyang — the munitions factory and an aerodrome with two hundred planes. Since then, the Japanese have attacked cities like Penki, Yingkow and Changchun. It is rumoured that Kirin has already been occupied, and Chinwangtao is already gone. . . . But the Kuomintang government's method of dealing with this fearful disgrace was merely to send a telegram to its representative at Geneva, Shih Chao-chi, asking the League of Nations to see that justice is done."

At this point, he suddenly gave Tao-ching a keen look and

demanded earnestly, "Do you think this wild hope can come to anything? Can China defeat Japan without an armed struggle?"

Tao-ching gazed steadily at Lu Chia-chuan. An element of surprise was mingled with the indignation he had aroused in her. She had never before met a university student like this. He was certainly very different from Yu Yung-tse, who talked of nothing but beautiful forms of art or moving romances. Lu Chia-chuan had a good understanding of current events, and this was the first time Tao-ching had heard such a bold exposition of the situation.

"I don't know!" she answered frankly after a moment's thought. Her cheeks flamed with embarrassment.

"But someone so anxious about our country's fate ought to know, don't you think so?" Lu Chia-chuan smiled.

"Well. . . ." Tao-ching smiled too, not knowing how to answer this young stranger.

"Chia-chuan, let's move on. Didn't you say you wanted to find out about the situation in Chinwangtao? Come on, let's go!" Li Chih-ting never liked to offend anyone. When he saw that Lu was embarrassing Tao-ching with his questions at their first meeting, he hurried to take his brother-in-law away.

As Tao-ching saw the two men to the gate, Lu Chia-chuan told both teachers:

"At this critical hour in the fate of our nation, none of us should stand aside with folded arms and look on!"

"What can we do?" muttered Li Chih-ting, slightly shaking his head and sighing. "We are pale-faced intellectuals with no weapons in our hands."

"A patriot need not shoulder a rifle and fight on the battlefield. You can arouse people by propaganda. If you teach your students to love and cherish our country, that's the same as taking up arms."

Li Chih-ting said nothing and Tao-ching made no answer either, but in her heart she knew that this was true. She felt a respect for this young man who was strangely unlike other people. In a brief conversation he had opened her eyes to so many things.

In a few days the storm was over and classes started again. Tao-ching did not give the third form a regular lesson during the first period. Ardent love for China triumphed over her personal troubles and for a whole period she talked to the children about the bitter news of the September the Eighteenth Incident* and the crime of Japan's invasion of China. She added what Lu Chia-chuan had said about the Kuomintang's policy of non-resistance. She spoke in a normal tone and often paused, but the children were deeply stirred by her indignation and the tears that welled up in her eyes. They listened quietly without fidgeting. The eyes of many glistened with tears, while several of the older girls were openly crying.

"Miss Lin, why don't we fight Japan?" asked one boy gruffly.

"Because the government doesn't love our country."

"What do we need to fight Japan, Miss Lin?"

"An army, rifles and artillery."

"Doesn't China have rifles and guns?" "Doesn't China have aeroplanes?" "Doesn't China have an army?" . . . Tao-ching could hardly keep up with their artless, puzzled questions.

"All the Kuomintang cares about is fighting a civil war, fighting the Chinese people. It doesn't dare fight Japan. It's afraid. . . ."

"We're not afraid! We'll fight!"

"We'll fight! I can fire a rifle!"

"We'll fight! We'll fight!"

The children's shouts re-echoed through the classroom and Tao-ching's heavy heart felt a lift of joy. They were such fine, sweet children! They all loved their country and knew they must resist Japan, must fight!

After this she often told the children stories about patriots like Wen Tien-hsiang, Yueh Fei and Shih Ke-fa, or foreign tales like *The Two Fishermen* and *The Last Lesson.* The boys and girls loved to hear these stories and she derived satisfaction from telling them. A closer bond sprang up between teacher and pupils, and her heart no longer seemed empty.

But one day another storm broke.

Yu Ching-tang came to the staff room. Blinking as usual, he looked round with his crafty, hypocritical smile at the four teachers sitting there, before fixing his eyes on Tao-ching. Speaking softly at first, he asked as if in real concern:

"Well, have you all heard? In Peiping and Tientsin the situation has grown very tense. The trouble-makers and students are creating general confusion by staging demonstrations and going on strike. Some have even gone to Nanking to demonstrate. . . . What a dirty trick! They profess to want to resist Japan, but in fact they are controlled by the Communists!" Abruptly raising one hand, he started to harangue them seriously. "Aren't they creating blind confusion? Can they save the country and defeat Japan this way? Remember that Generalissimo Chiang has given orders for no resistance because he has his own way of dealing with the whole problem! Now, I'd have you know, it has reached my ears that there is anti-Japanese propaganda going on in our school!" He swallowed hard, turned to the four silent teachers sitting there and threw each a crafty look before finally looking directly at Tao-ching. "Yes, Miss Lin, you are very young but you must be especially careful! What's this you've been telling your students about fishermen? If you give outsiders the impression that we have Reds carrying on seditious propaganda in our school, I may be involved and lose my head!"

The other teachers remained silent. Tao-ching looked wrathfully at Yu and cried:

"I don't care in the least, Mr. Yu, what happens to your head. At a time of national crisis like this, why shouldn't every Chinese be free to speak about the need to resist Japan? Does calling for resistance to Japan make you a Red? Is there a law against it?"

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* On September 18, 1931, the Japanese attacked Shenyang. Chiang Kai-shek promptly ordered the Chinese troops there to withdraw, so that the Japanese swiftly occupied China's three northeastern provinces.

Li Chih-ting turned pale while the other teachers sat dumbfounded, amazed to hear shy, quiet Miss Lin answer the headmaster so boldly.

Yu Ching-tang's thin face darkened; he even stopped blinking. Speechless for some seconds, he swung around and walked away. At the door he halted, turned and swished his wide sleeves. Blinking at Tao-ching he sneered in a voice that trembled:

"Don't ask me! If there's anything you don't understand, I suggest that you go and ask Generalissimo Chiang!"

"Don't worry!" retorted Tao-ching as he walked away. "The students of Peking University have gone to Nanking to ask for me."

Yung-tse's letter had told her that his fellow students were opposed to the government's policy of non-resistance and to the proposal to make Chinchow a neutral zone. Many of them had gone to Nanking to stage a demonstration. Yung-tse said he had meant to go too, but had been prevented by an attack of influenza. He also told her that the deputy leader of the demonstrators was Li Chih-ting's brother-in-law, Lu Chia-chuan.

"Lu Chia-chuan? . . ." Sitting alone in her room, still smouldering after her argument with the headmaster, she remembered her unexpected encounter with Lu and smiled to think of him leading a contingent of students to Nanking to settle scores with the Kuomintang. With a sense of gratitude she murmured his name, as if the young man had helped her to vent her indignation.

Chapter 7

One cold, dark night, pale moonlight glimmered on a long train hurtling through the vast countryside. It was after midnight and most of the passengers, huddled in cramped discomfort, were sleeping through the rhythmic pounding of the racing wheels. Some, however, were arguing heatedly in

low tones or leaning against the cold walls of the coach singing in subdued voices.

This was true of the first and second coaches. The train was carrying unusual passengers — students from universities in Peking on their way to Nanking to demonstrate before the Kuomintang government.

More than two hundred students from Peking University had crowded into the luggage van at the end of the train to sleep. But three young men had gathered in the guard's cabin for a talk under the dim light.

"Well, Chia-chuan, Ta-fang, the Party has given us a heavy responsibility this time! When the Nanking government sees that we have come thousands of *li* to protest against its policy and can't be fobbed off with fine talk, it'll probably use force." The speaker was Li Meng-yu, leader of this contingent going south to make a demonstration.

"We're not afraid!" rejoined Lo Ta-fang, a sturdy, red-cheeked youth, lightly striking the little table with his clenched fist. "Even if many lives are lost — as happened in the March the Eighteenth Incident* — fresh blood will arouse the people as nothing else can. Those who are still asleep will wake up if our blood is shed!"

The third in the group was Lu Chia-chuan, whom we first met in Peitaiho. His half-closed eyes widened to stare at Lo Ta-fang, and shaking his head he said:

"No, Ta-fang, don't be so naive. Wise men use the smallest possible sacrifice to win the biggest possible victory. We triumphed over the reactionary student association on November 30 and won over a great many fellow students to come and demonstrate in Nanking. But how are we to gain an even greater victory after we reach Nanking? How will the reactionaries try to deal with us? This is something we ought to think over." He said no more but grew thoughtful.

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* On March 18, 1926, several thousand students and citizens of Peking demonstrated against imperialism at Tien An Men. The troops of the warlord Tuan Chi-jui opened fire, killing nearly fifty of the demonstrators and wounding many others.

The day after the September the Eighteenth Incident, students in Shanghai, Peiping, Tientsin, Hangchow, Taiyuan, Sian and elsewhere had launched a widespread movement to resist Japanese aggression and save the country. Refusing to attend classes, they presented petitions and demonstrated, demanding that the Kuomintang government call out troops to resist Japan. But the Nanking government, wedded to its policy of non-resistance, turned a deaf ear to these demands. On November 25, 1931, it even cabled to its representative in the League of Nations, Shih Chao-chi, instructing him to ask the League to arrange that Chinchow be made a "neutral zone" under international control, promising that, in return, Chinese troops would withdraw to within the Great Wall at Shanhaikuan Pass. This treacherous plan to surrender the northeast to the imperialists aroused even greater anger throughout the country; factory workers went on strike, while students in schools and universities stopped going to class and set off in large numbers to go to Nanking and protest. The students of Peking University were among the first to organize a group of demonstrators, and they were now on their way to Nanking.

The train was swaying slightly. A bitter wind howling across the open country was making the unheated coach unbearably cold. Big, burly Li Meng-yu pulled his peaked cap forward and Lu Chia-chuan rubbed his numbed hands; but Lo Ta-fang, oblivious of the cold, lowered his head to think over what Lu had just said. After some time his head jerked up as if he had suddenly awakened from a nap.

"Other students send petitions, we are coming to demonstrate," he said. "Of course that will enrage our lordly rulers in Nanking. . . . Is that what you're afraid of?" He gave Lu Chia-chuan a sharp glance, shaking his head in disapproval.

"No, Ta-fang, what an idea!" Lu Chia-chuan smiled and gripped his friend's big hand. "Anticipating the worst isn't cowardice. Don't forget we are Marxists."

"Right," said Li Meng-yu. "Chia-chuan is correct to use forethought. We must never underestimate our enemies. Let's talk of practical problems. I think we need a new division of labour. Chia-chuan, you're alert and quick-witted. You be responsible for dealing with the reactionaries this time. Ta-fang and I are tough and have loud voices. We'll take charge of the demonstration itself."

Before he had finished voices were heard outside, the door opened, and a number of students rushed in.

"We've come to report! The Message to the People, the leaflets, flags and arm-bands are all finished!" announced a healthy, handsome lad, walking in with a big bundle of red and green propaganda material under his arm. "Are there any further instructions, respected commanders?"

This lively youngster, Hsu Ning, made them all laugh.

"You must all be tired out, Hsu Ning. Did you have enough paper?" said Lu Chia-chuan as he reached out quickly for the bundle, which he then stowed carefully on the guard's berth. He rejoined them, his eyes shining, to shake Hsu Ning and another boy warmly by the hand. "These are very useful weapons you've made for our demonstrators. Thanks a lot!" Then he turned to ask a small, thin, capable-looking girl, "Have you worked out the slogans, Hsu Hui?"

"Yes, I have. Will you see if they'll do?" Before she could hand her paper to Lu Chia-chuan, Hsu Ning took it.

"You are too tired, let me read them for you!" First he faced Hsu Hui and said with a smile, "You're well known as one of the best students at Peking University — how could anything be wrong with slogans written by Your Ladyship? Here, let me read them to you. 'Down with the betrayal of our three northeastern provinces! We oppose a neutral zone under international control! Down with the policy of capitulation! Down with the government's suppression of the popular anti-Japanese movement! Oppressed people throughout the country, unite! Down with Japanese imperialism! . . .'" As Hsu Ning read on, his voice rose and he waved his clenched fist higher and higher. Finally he sprang on to a stool, and brandishing his fist began to shout.

"Be quiet, Hsu Ning!" said Li Meng-yu. "Let the others get all the rest they can. They'll need all their energy for the fight in Nanking."

At that instant, shouts could be heard outside their door.

"Down with Japanese imperialism! Long live the liberation of the Chinese nation!"

Passionate voices were filled with righteous indignation. They were more than usually arresting and stirring, coming so late on the cold night, from the bleak, dark, windowless coach.

Before dawn the three young men in the guard's cabin were beginning to yawn and droop. These newly-elected leaders of the reorganized student association had worked for three days and nights without any sleep during their heated struggle against the reactionary student association and the university authorities who were trying to check their activities. They were utterly exhausted. Lu Chia-chuan and Lo Ta-fang had just dropped off when Li Meng-yu roused them with these words:

"Here! I've had an idea! When we get to Nanking, suppose we inform the garrison headquarters of our plan and ask for 'protection' during our demonstration?"

"What?" Lo Ta-fang sounded highly dubious. "Protection? When we demonstrate before a treacherous government, we first ask it for protection? What's the idea?"

Li Meng-yu smiled, quite unruffled, and added unhurriedly:

"Sometimes we use peaceful methods, sometimes force. That's what is meant by tactics."

"That's it! You're right! That's a good idea. You've made me think." Lu Chia-chuan picked up a bundle of small paper flags from the berth and waved them as if to ward off the urge to sleep.

Lo Ta-fang stared round-eyed at them as if to say: "What's come over you two veterans anyway?" He then found somewhere else to sleep. Lu Chia-chuan curled up on the bunk and dozed off immediately. That left only Li Meng-yu who was seated on a stool beside the small table. He had too much to think about to sleep. After a little time he stood up, noticed Lu Chia-chuan curled up for warmth and muttering in his sleep, gently covered him with his own cotton-padded coat, and then left the cabin.

Picking his way through fellow students sleeping in every imaginable position on the floor, he went to the closed door. His head was swimming, and he wanted to clear his brain with a breath of fresh air. He leaned close to the door and through a wide crack saw the murky open country through which they were passing. The sky would soon be light, for already the east was glimmering like the belly of a fish. As the ever-changing countryside flashed past, he caught glimpses of a few unchanging stars twinkling above and of a high range of mountains faintly visible against the grey horizon. He inhaled the cold fresh air coming through the door and yawned. When he heard, far off, the spasmodic crowing of cocks and the barking of dogs, something seemed to tug at his heart. The countryside before him appeared to be falling back swiftly, never to appear again, as the train rushed on. He stared avidly at a bright stream and some saplings as they flashed past, and the eyes of this calm, sturdy youth filled abruptly with tears....

This contingent of students from Peking University left Peiping on December 1 and reached Nanking on the third. The arrival of the demonstrators transformed the busy, peaceful capital, as if an enemy had appeared at its gates. The main roads and streets were heavily policed by soldiers with loaded rifles. The students from the north put up in the Central University gymnasium, and immediately motor-cars started honking incessantly outside the gate, as men from the Kuomintang's Nanking headquarters and hordes of reporters came crowding round to pick up "news". On the morning of the fourth, the garrison headquarters of the capital seized several thousand copies of the students' "Message to the People", and arrested the proprietor of the press that had printed it. On the morning of the fifth, Li Meng-yu appeared with an ultimatum in his hand. The dozen representatives of the demonstrators gathered round to hear him read:

> The so-called "Peking University Contingent of Demonstrators" upon its arrival in the capital has threatened to hold demonstrations in defiance of all advice. It has engaged in subversive activities and spread malicious rumours. Yesterday it printed slanderous handbills charging the government with "trampling upon and selling out the Chinese nation." The handbill ended with obvious reactionary propaganda, "We have no trust in this government and will strive to overthrow it," as well as such reckless statements as "We order the government. . . ." The tone of these utterances is identical with that of the Communist Party. . . .

"That's enough," interrupted Lu Chia-chuan, gently taking from Li Meng-yu's hands the official communication from the garrison headquarters. "You needn't read any more. What follows will be nothing but the charge that a pack of hooligans are conspiring against the government, and the threat that for the sake of the country and the people they will have to resort to punitive measures to deal with us. . . . Well, the situation is very critical; we must quickly decide what to do!"

The representatives immediately held an emergency meeting at which they resolved that, regardless of the threat from the authorities, the whole contingent would demonstrate at eleven that same morning. They would also send Lu Chia-chuan, deputy head of the contingent, to Garrison Commander Ku Cheng-lun to explain their plan and ask for protection.

When Lu Chia-chuan heard this decision he remained silent for a while, his eyes suddenly dulled. When he was with Li Meng-yu and the other students, he feared nothing. In fact he was eager to hear their shouted slogans rending the skies above Nanking. But now he was to part company with the rest and go alone to see this man Ku Cheng-lun.

"What's on your mind, Old Lu?" The representatives had dispersed to assemble the students for the demonstration, leaving only Li Meng-yu and Lu Chia-chuan in the small room which served as their office.

Lu Chia-chuan smiled faintly, then rose and gripped Li Meng-yu's hands.

"Old Li, you're right. I'll go off on my mission now. The whole responsibility for guiding the demonstration will fall on the rest of you."

"No, wait a moment!" cried Li after some thought. "It's not safe for you to go alone. If anything should happen, you wouldn't even be able to send us word. Let Hsu Ning go with you. He's got his wits about him."

"Good!" responded Lu Chia-chuan. "In the meantime I wish you success!" He gripped his friend's hands again in parting, as if he were setting out on a long journey from which he might not return.

Lu Chia-chuan and Hsu Ning, wearing the contingent's arm-bands, went together to the garrison headquarters. Producing the written reply from their contingent, they asked to see the garrison commander.

They waited a long time in the reception room but the garrison commander did not appear. Finally a fair-complexioned middle-aged man in Western-style clothes and leather shoes came out to see them. He smiled, lit a cigarette, and greeted the two young men before sitting down on the couch to size them up. Speaking very slowly, he inquired:

"May I ask what business brings you here?"

"I take it you are not the garrison commander. We wish to see Commander Ku." Lu Chia-chuan enunciated each word carefully, looking even calmer and more cultivated than the man who had just come in.

The newcomer frowned slightly, sensing that he was up against a worthy opponent. After puffing at his cigarette, he said with a nod:

"I am the garrison commander's chief-of-staff with full authority to represent him. Please let me know what it is you want to tell him."

"Our Peking University contingent of demonstrators has decided to march this morning at eleven. Our route will run through Chenghsien Street, Chungshan Road and the Flowery Arch, turning at the Confucian Temple to go along Chunghua Road and Chungcheng Street past the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Kuomintang Central Headquarters. We have come to ask your garrison headquarters to send out extra troops and police to protect us." Lu Chia-chuan kept his serious eyes on the chief-of-staff and spoke without a pause.

The smile vanished suddenly from the chief's face, he hurled away his cigarette stub, and sternly demanded:

"Why is it, pray, that whereas all other schools have simply sent petitions to the capital, your university alone talks of a demonstration? What purpose will this serve? To whom will you demonstrate?"

"The time for presenting petitions has passed." Lu Chia-chuan hit back sharply with a smile. "Thousands upon thousands of petitions have been presented in the last three months, but your answer continues to be 'No resistance.' That is why we have come to demonstrate. To whom shall we demonstrate? To Japanese imperialism which is oppressing the Chinese nation. To the flunkeys of Japanese imperialism, who are selling out the interests of the Chinese nation."

"And how do you propose to do this?"

"In the manner I have just outlined," replied Lu Chia-chuan gravely. "You sent us an official letter, charging us with plotting against the government and threatening to resort to punitive measures. So we are here to inform the garrison commander that our coming to Nanking is solely for patriotic reasons and is in no sense unlawful. Please do not put any difficulties in our way."

"You are mistaken!" The chief-of-staff was smiling again. "You claim to be patriots, but your handbills and slogans are thoroughly reactionary. To preserve peace and order in the capital, we may, of course, be forced to put a stop to your activities."

Hsu Ning shook his fist and cried indignantly:

"That won't be any use! If you insist on using force, we certainly shan't give in! But if anything unfortunate should happen, the government will have to answer for it!"

While the chief-of-staff remained silent, drawing vigorously on a newly lighted cigarette, Lu Chia-chuan glanced approvingly at Hsu Ning, then saw from his watch that it was nearly eleven. He rose, saying:

"Our parade is about to start. Please inform your commander at once and ask him to instruct the army and police not to put any obstacles in our way. . . ."

Before he had finished speaking, an orderly came in and handed him a slip of paper. "Write down your names, please!"

Lu Chia-chuan did so without hesitation.

As soon as the names were written down, the chief-of-staff withdrew, saying, "Very well, I will give Commander Ku your message."

Left alone in the large, dark room, the two students smiled at each other and then sighed.

"The march has already begun!" Hsu Ning gripped his friend's hand, his great eyes flashing.

"Yes, it must have begun!" Lu Chia-chuan nodded. Hot tears sprang to his eyes and he turned his face away for an instant before clasping Hsu Ning's hands with a smile.

Half an hour later the chief-of-staff returned. He was no longer affable, and as soon as he entered the room he barked:

"This is going too far! According to a report just received, your parade has already started! Naturally we have had to send men to keep order. You two must stay here." He then turned and went out.

The two young men said nothing. Both had a vision of the mighty ranks of the demonstrators shouting slogans, perhaps fighting and shedding blood. . . .

"Come on! Let's go and join the contingent!" Lu Chia-chuan seized Hsu Ning's arm and they started to walk out. At the door, however, a dark, fat man stopped them with the words:

"Where are you going? You're too late. Get back inside! You'll get special consideration!"

"Why are you holding us?" demanded the young men indignantly.

"There's rioting outside. You'd much better stay and rest here for a while." And with a laugh the fat man went away. The next instant half a dozen soldiers appeared — fully armed — and marched the two students off.

When they reached the raised path to the lock-up, eight soldiers with rifles searched them from head to foot, and even took away Hsu Ning's smart tie.

"See what special consideration we're getting!" Lu Chia-chuan chuckled.

Hsu Ning was less calm and collected. His face was flushed as he whispered:

"What are they going to do with us?"

Lu Chia-chuan shook his head and patted the boy lightly on the shoulder.

"What devilish tricks are you up to now? Get moving!" A soldier prodded Lu Chia-chuan with the butt of his gun and pushed them both into a cell with a grilled door.

They were certainly getting "special consideration". There were only two others in the cell, making four in all. The air was not too bad, and there were board beds and windows with bars.

When the two other inmates saw the newcomers, they did not wait for the guards to retire, but hastened to the door to greet them with the question:

"What college are you from?"

It turned out that they were students of Central University in Nanking. Their active part in the patriotic movement after the September the Eighteenth Incident had led to their imprisonment in the garrison headquarters, where they had been for more than two months.

Like old friends meeting after a long separation, the four entered into eager conversation. Hsu Ning, who had rather lost heart, brightened up again.

"We are members of the Peking University contingent of demonstrators," he told them proudly. "We had to lie on the railway tracks before they let us on to the train for Nanking to demonstrate to this government of traitors. I'm afraid a hand-to-hand battle is going on at this moment between our members and the reactionaries here."

The other two exclaimed excitedly at this, adding simultaneously:

"What's happening outside?"

Lu Chia-chuan sat down on one of the beds and described how the Peking University students had come to Nanking, and their experiences since their arrival. As soon as he finished, one of them shook him warmly by the hand and said:

"My name is Yang Hsu. He's Wu Hung-tao. Now let me tell you about conditions here. Oh, no, that can wait a bit. It's one o'clock and I'm sure you haven't eaten. I'll get you some food first."

Yang Hsu knew the ropes in the lock-up, and presently a fellow prisoner brought in some food. While Lu Chia-chuan and Hsu Ning were eating, something was shot into the cell through the grill. Lu Chia-chuan, always alert, turned just in time to see a guard with a bayonet pass swiftly by. Yang Hsu picked up and unrolled a small twist of paper, then called the other three to read it with him.

> Many Peking University students have just been seized on Chenghsien Street. They have probably been taken to the Ming Tomb Barracks.

Lu Chia-chuan was silent, but Hsu Ning banged his fist upon the wooden bed and burst out weeping as he fell face downward. Yang Hsu and Wu Hung-tao watched them in a daze and for a time said nothing.

Presently Lu Chia-chuan in a low voice asked Yang Hsu: "Is this source reliable?"

He turned pale when Yang Hsu looked outside the grill and nodded.

Hsu Ning slept the whole afternoon while his friend sat on the bed, his back to the wall, his head lowered in thought, considering what was likely to happen to the whole contingent and what action it would take. How many students had been arrested? Had there been any casualties? What had happened to Li Meng-yu, Lo Ta-fang and other leaders of their group? Was it possible that the movement for which they had gone through so many difficulties was going to be broken up by the reactionary government? "No, never!" He closed his eyes and shook his head. "The Chinese people won't stand for this any longer. That goes especially for our young people. If some fall, others will take their place — that's certain. . . ." Occupied with the problems of the contingent, he forgot that he himself was behind bars until a strange sound penetrated the dark cell, and aroused him.

Someone in the next cell was tapping on the wall and calling softly:

"Listen, Old Yang! They're shouting slogans outside!"

The four young men sprang to their feet and strained their ears.

But they could hear nothing distinctly, only a sound like the soughing of the wind in the distance.

"Can it be soldiers returning from the parade ground?" asked Yang Hsu.

"Maybe our Peking University demonstrators are marching this way!" Hsu Ning's spirits rose in a burst of astonished delight.

"Listen, Old Yang!" Someone in the next cell was tapping on the wall again.

"Down with. . . ."

"Oppose. . . ."

Yes, far away, slogans were being shouted.

The whole prison at once became as quiet as the grave. Lu Chia-chuan felt his heart beat faster. . . . "They're coming! . . . It may really be our student demonstrators!" he thought.

The four young men pressed their cheeks against the iron grill. The grey and melancholy twilight had suddenly taken on an extraordinary beauty.

"Oppose the government's betrayal of our three northeastern provinces!"

"Down with the executioner Ku Cheng-lun!"

"Set free the arrested Peking University students!"

The sounds were very clear now, they flooded in, bold and indignant, through the stone walls, and reached the ears of the four young prisoners.

"There are sure to be some from our Central University there!" Slim, boyish Wu Hung-tao grinned at Hsu Ning.

"There must be more from Peking University," bragged Hsu Ning in the same high spirits.

"The death-knell of the rulers is sounding!" Lu Chia-chuan and Yang Hsu, older and more experienced than the other two, exchanged glances, hardly knowing which had spoken these words. Had their fellow students really come here? They could scarcely believe it.

The shouting crowd seemed to have reached the gate of the garrison headquarters. A tumult of voices, wrathfully shouting slogans, uttering angry cries, carried right into the prison.

A sudden confusion broke out in the prison itself. Yang Hsu seized Hsu Ning by the arm and said:

"Look! The fools have taken down the sign over the lock-up!"

The four of them peered out of the window.

On the raised path in front, army officers and soldiers were milling about, and a private carrying a large wooden placard was hurrying past their window.

"As panic-stricken as homeless curs!" commented Lu Chia-chuan, just as a burst of tremendous shouting brought them to rigid attention.

"Charge! Break in!"

"Break in! Break in!"

"Come on! To the rescue of the Peking University students!"

It was like hearing the voice of someone near and dear far away from home, and Lu Chia-chuan and Hsu Ning were moved to tears. Their hearts beating furiously, they pressed against the bars to listen.

"Down with Japanese imperialism! . . . Down with this traitorous government! . . . Free the Peking University students! . . ." The slogans were repeated in a rising crescendo. The pounding on the main gate, the cries and shouts, became louder and louder. Suddenly there was a great crash, drowning the tumult and shouting, as the crowd burst through the first gate of the garrison headquarters.

Without warning the lights went out. The whole premises, including the prison, were plunged into darkness and terror. The clamour abated for a moment, but the click of rifles being cocked, the tramping of heavy boots, and the thud of sand-bags being dumped increased the tension. There was death in the air, the whole prison reeked of gunpowder.

The four young men looked at each other, and with grimy hands wiped the perspiration from their foreheads.

Outside, the shouting started again.

"We demand an immediate answer!"

"Why haven't the students been freed yet? Why aren't they freed?"

"This won't do! Let's fight our way in! Charge! . . ."

The prisoners clearly heard the sounds of another heavy attack on the gate, mingled with the roar of shouted slogans. They heard, too, the clatter of machine-guns being mounted on the roof.

It was to be a fight, at close range, between the students and the authorities.

"When things get hot, you can trust the reactionaries to use force!" said Yang Hsu softly, tugging at Lu Chia-chuan's sleeve.

Hsu Ning gave a cry of dismay.

"Yes, the situation is serious," said Lu Chia-chuan, and turning away from the window began to pace the cell. He was doing his best to master his excitement so that he could think calmly about the danger. It seemed to him that if

the crowd went on trying to fight its way in, there might, at any moment, be a repetition of the massacre of March the Eighteenth. . . . What was to be done? Many of his fellow students, whom the Party had entrusted to his care, must be in the ranks now attacking the garrison headquarters. How could he let them throw away their lives? His mind was in a turmoil. He cudgelled his brains in an attempt to solve this desperately urgent and difficult problem.

Outside, the shouting grew louder and more indignant, until it seemed to rend the sky.

"Charge! We must attack for all we're worth! Save the Peking University students!"

"They've got guns and bullets, but we have hot blood!"

"Forward! Attack! . . ."

The tumult of anger was followed by another great crash as the second gate gave way, and the crowd surged in. The yells and shouts drew nearer to the dark prison, where they could be heard distinctly.

"Come and have a look!" Hsu Ning dragged Lu Chia-chuan to the window. In the guardroom opposite, they could see soldiers hurriedly charging and cocking their guns by the light of torches, mounting their bayonets, and taking deadly aim at the prison cells.

Hugging the iron bars of the window, the four students watched without moving.

Suddenly, as if from a great distance, a low voice came to their ears:

"We've orders to fire on the students as soon as they break open the third gate."

Lu Chia-chuan whirled in the direction of the voice, and glimpsed a guard shouldering a rifle, with its bayonet mounted, vanishing around the side of the building. He quickly asked Yang Hsu:

"Who's that?"

"A patriotic soldier." Yang Hsu's broad face, when next a torch shone on it, was very pale.

Tapping sounded again, and someone softly transmitted the message: "The machine-guns on the roof are trained on the third gate."

Hsu Ning gripped Lu Chia-chuan's arm. "Will they fire on the prison first?"

"I don't think so," Lu Chia-chuan answered, shaking off Hsu Ning's hand to draw Yang Hsu aside. After thinking seriously for a few moments he said, "Old Yang, in this crisis we've got to make a quick decision. Have you any way to send a message to the students outside? They've already dealt the die-hards a severe blow, and we suggest that they call a halt for the time being, in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. How about it?"

Yang Hsu replied after a moment's thought:

"You mean to compromise? Must we give in after such a brave beginning? We should think it over well."

"No!" Lu Chia-chuan was firm. "It's too urgent, we've no time to think. You write a note to the Central University students, and I'll write to our contingent. That patriotic soldier will deliver them for us, I think?"

Wu Hung-tao and Hsu Ning left the window to join them, and, standing there, they held a short emergency meeting. As a result, Lu Chia-chuan's proposal was adopted.

Yang Hsu produced a pencil stump and a piece of paper and gave them to Lu Chia-chuan. Wu Hung-tao and Hsu Ning held up the quilt as a blind, while Yang Hsu struck a match and Lu Chia-chuan scribbled a note. When he had finished, he held a match for Yang Hsu to write his note. This done, Yang Hsu went to the window and coughed three times. A hand immediately reached in and took the two slips of paper.

Outside the third gate the roar of the crowd had grown still louder.

"You die-hards! Why don't you fire? You have guns and bullets, while all we have is hot blood. . . ." In the dark night, the shouting from a thousand young throats ceased only for a second, to be followed almost immediately by another indignant outburst. The tramp of feet, the yelling and bellowing, swelled louder and louder, like rolling, crashing thunder.

The students were hurling themselves against the third gate, which was beginning to crack under their assault.

It was zero hour. The enemy machine-guns on the roof were trained on the students outside the iron gate, lying in wait like ravening tigers.

Lu Chia-chuan and his three companions clung to each other as they flattened themselves against the window.

Darkness will not reign for ever;
Night must end, and day will break.

Lu Chia-chuan began to sing softly. He could not count on their messages having any effect, and was mentally preparing for the end. As he sang, the others joined in.

Night must end, and day will break. . . .

About ten minutes later, however, they were awakened out of their dreams.

"Central University, fall in here!"

"Peking University, fall in here!"

Above the confusion bugles were ringing out.

The lights in the prison came on again.

"That was a close shave!" exclaimed Hsu Ning, wiping the perspiration from his forehead and jumping up in relief.

Yang Hsu turned and seized Lu Chia-chuan's hands so hard that they hurt.

"It's worth spending all our lives here for this, isn't it?" Lu Chia-chuan smiled, tears in his eyes.

Chapter 8

A day came when Tao-ching could no longer endure Yu Ching-tang's petty persecution at the Yangchuang School. Without waiting for the winter holiday, she quietly fled from Peitaiho to Peiping just as she had once fled from Peiping to Peitaiho.

Her salary as a teacher had only been fifteen yuan a month, so that after paying for her board, stationery, postage stamps and other incidentals, she had not been able to afford warm clothes. She set off dressed in a thinly padded gown with no luggage but a small roll of bedding and clothing, having given away the musical instruments, which she had long felt too unhappy to play, to her pupils. On the train she wondered where to stay in Peiping, reflecting that Director Hu was probably still looking out for her. Of course, as she had written in her diary, she would rather starve than "sell her soul"; for she was determined to keep her integrity unstained by any base, material considerations. . . .

Not until the train was pulling in to Peiping's Eastern Station, did she finally decide to seek out her good friend Wang Hsiao-yen.

Hsiao-yen, in her third and last year in senior high school, was the same age as Tao-ching. Even-tempered and warm-hearted, she was the sort of girl whom even older students would call "Big Sister." Her father, Wang Hung-pin, was a professor in the History Department of Peking University; her mother was a gentle, kindly housewife with some education. Hsiao-yen, who had grown up in a happy, peaceful home surrounded by affection, was the reverse of impulsive, fearless Tao-ching. Pleasant and refined, her sole concern was to study hard so that in time she might become a scholar like her father.

As soon as she saw Hsiao-yen, Tao-ching seized her hands but could not trust herself to speak. Hsiao-yen did not recognize her at first; for, despite the cold, her friend was wearing a very thinly padded black gown covered with dust and marked with grease spots. She also looked exhausted after her journey. Hsiao-yen gazed at her incredulously for some seconds, then called her name with a warm smile of welcome.

"Come and have a wash," she urged, not knowing how else to demonstrate her affection. "Then you can change into some of my things — you look just like a country girl."

"Don't you dare look down on country folk! My mother. . . ." Still pouting, Tao-ching realized that there was no need to flare up, and with a smile she changed the subject. "You don't know how lucky you are, Hsiao-yen, with a fine family like yours — father, mother and sisters." Though there was a smile on her face, her eyes were moist as she turned quickly aside to reach for a towel.

Hsiao-yen watched her with compassion. "Stop feeling sorry for yourself all the time! You must stay here till father finds something for you to do."

"All right." Tao-ching smiled ruefully and the two girls looked at each other for a few seconds. Then, unable to contain herself any longer, Tao-ching threw her arms around Hsiao-yen and whispered: "Do you know Yu Yung-tse? We've become good friends. . . ."

"As if I didn't know that long ago!" And with a placid smile Hsiao-yen pushed her away. "You'd better call on him soon. He must be anxious to see you."

That evening Tao-ching went to see Yung-tse and they talked in his small room in the hostel till late. When she left he insisted on seeing her back, and they strolled together through the quiet night to the Jade Girdle Stream in front of Tien An Men, where they halted beside the marble balustrade. By the dim light of the street lamps, Yung-tse held her cold hand tightly and gazed into her eyes for what seemed an eternity. Then, deeply stirred, he begged her in a voice that trembled:

"Lin, will you become my sweetheart? I shall always, always love you!"

Tao-ching bent her head without saying a word. Her heart throbbed with rapture and her cheeks turned crimson. Was this what was meant by young love? This happiness? Unable to restrain herself, she took Yung-tse's hand and leaned her head against his shoulder. . . .

Not even love could drive away her troubles. Hsiao-yen and her parents were kindness itself, but she could not stay with them indefinitely. She must find a way, without delay, to make a living. So the day after her return to Peiping she started looking up former school friends and teachers who might introduce her to a job. When alone in her room, she went through the advertisements in the newspapers in the hope of finding suitable employment.

The days went by like this until two weeks had passed. She was desperate. No matter how hard she tried, there seemed no hope of finding a job. Professor Wang tactfully explained to her that, under existing conditions, even university graduates and those with special qualifications had little chance of getting work unless they had some influence. It was not going to be easy for a young girl like Tao-ching. And for these reasons he counselled patience. But Tao-ching was unconvinced, she thought that a city the size of Peiping must surely have openings, and continued to hurry this way and that in search of work. A month passed, and she had still found nothing. Mrs. Wang begged her many times not to be in such a hurry, assuring her that she was welcome to stay with them; while Hsiao-yen urged her to exercise discretion and not become involved with the wrong kind of people. Their advice, intended to reassure her, could not overcome her sense of urgency, and she followed up even the slightest chance of a job. But all to no avail! One day a local paper, the *Hsiao Shih Pao,* printed an advertisement for a governess. Feeling such a job would suit her and that the terms were quite acceptable, she made up her mind to apply in person.

She dressed herself carefully and attractively, put on Hsiao-yen's green woollen overcoat and was just going out with a smart handbag under her arm when she ran into her friend coming home from school. Hsiao-yen stopped her to ask:

"Off to try your luck again?"

"No, only to post a letter." After so many lectures on the subject of finding employment, Tao-ching decided not to tell the truth.

Hsiao-yen saw through her pretence, however, and gave her a playful shove. "Run along, then! I wish you luck! Don't be too late home!"

With an embarrassed smile Tao-ching turned and left.

The address proved to be an imposing house, with a large red gate, situated near the Eastern Arch. She was shown into

a fashionable reception room, furnished in a somewhat Japanese style. After a long wait a man with a flamboyant moustache and wearing a Western-style suit came in and politely offered her tea and cigarettes. He inquired about her age and where she had studied, appraising her all the time with dull, shifty eyes. Though ill at ease, she forced herself to answer, and presently she asked:

"Where is your little boy, sir? How old is he? What lessons will he require?"

The stout, ungainly man sprawled back suddenly on the couch with a bellow of laughter, disclosing the gold fillings in his teeth. Then, sprucing himself, he tweaked his moustache and straightened his tie, and answered with a smile:

"Miss Lin, you are a very worthy young woman. My wife and son are still in our great country — Japan, I mean. You can begin your duties by teaching me. I shall pay you handsomely. You will make plenty of money, I assure you!" He started chuckling again.

Tao-ching felt stunned as, with some faltered excuse, she fled like a startled deer. When she was some distance from the imposing mansion she stopped to stare back at the haughty red gate, and with trembling fingers rubbed her bewildered eyes.

Instead of going back to Hsiao-yen's home she went straight to see Yung-tse.

She found him at his desk writing. When he rose to take her hand, she shook her head and sank on to a seat. Burying her face in both hands, she sat silent and motionless.

Yung-tse stood nonplussed by her side as the minutes ticked past.

"What is it, Tao-ching?" he asked gently. "Are you angry with me?"

"Oh, no! Not with you. Don't pay any attention, please. I'll be all right in a minute."

He said no more but watched her in dismayed perplexity. The room remained silent till Tao-ching was calm enough to raise her head and look at him with a wan smile.

"I'm all right now. It's passed. . . . I can see now more clearly than ever that China is a sacrifice on the altar of greed. There are vicious, lawless gangsters everywhere. . . . Yung-tse, do you know the story of Chiang Tai Kung? When I was a child, my old nurse often told me: 'Your luck may change. Before Chiang Tai Kung met Emperor Wen Wang and was made prime minister, he lost his fish-hook when fishing and upset his basket when he was selling flour.' I wonder if my luck will ever change." She tried to hide her bitterness, but the tears stood in her eyes. Recovering presently, she threw back her head like a child and cried, "But I don't believe in fate! Whatever comes, I can take it! I'm bound to find some way out in the end!"

She told him of her recent experience, and Yung-tse listened intently. When she had finished, he was not his usual genial self, and after pacing the room a couple of times he turned to regard her seriously and steadily.

"Tao-ching, forgive me for speaking plainly!" he said. "Our feeling for each other makes it impossible for me to keep silent any longer. The reckless way in which you're rushing about is too risky. In times like these, even more able and experienced people than you often come to grief. Yet you're dashing to and fro like an untamed colt. What use is it? Ideals are all very well, but you can't get away from reality. I'm afraid, if you go on like this, you'll soon wear yourself out and will have nothing to show for your pains."

It struck Tao-ching, as she stared at his lean dark face and small bright eyes, that Yung-tse was neither handsome nor cultivated. In any case, this was strange advice to be giving to her! More distressed than ever, she watched him coldly and without a word.

"Darling!" After a moment's silence he approached and took her in his arms, murmuring softly, "Listen, Tao-ching! Come and live with me! This is the tenth time I've asked you. . . . Think how happy we can be here! I shall come back from lectures to a delicious meal prepared with your own hands. I shall be able to teach you more about the literature you love. If you like, I can help you with any poems you may write.

It's true my allowance from home isn't very large, but if we practise a little economy, we can make it do for two. Why don't you take the happiness waiting for you instead of rushing hither and thither so wildly? You're getting nowhere and simply living on others."

"That's enough." Tao-ching put her hands over his mouth, then drew back to hide her eyes. Soon she looked up and said accusingly, "Yung-tse, you've changed. Living on others? Wouldn't I be living on you if I stayed with you? Please stop talking about this every time we meet. If you don't I shall know you're trying to take advantage of my present helpless situation. . . ." Her lips trembled and it was clear that she was struggling to control her anger.

Standing perplexed beside her, Yung-tse took her arm and pleaded:

"Darling Tao-ching! Don't talk like that! I love you! I shall always love you, always! You are my life, my soul — I can't live without you! . . ."

Tao-ching smiled. Assurances like these were enough to melt any heart, especially the heart of a girl in love for the first time.

Chapter 9

Dearly as Tao-ching loved Yung-tse, she had no wish to marry as yet. Each time he urged her she refused him, till at last in his distress he took to his bed, buried his head in the quilt, and neglected his classes. When Tao-ching discovered him in this condition she anxiously demanded:

"What's the matter, Yung-tse? Are you ill?" She felt his forehead but he had no fever. His gloomy expression indicated that he was in very low spirits.

"Sit down, Tao-ching." He looked at her with a bitter smile. "I have a pain in my chest. I've had heart attacks before, in fact I once nearly died from one, but during the last few years I've had no trouble. Yesterday I had another attack.

It was probably brought on by. . . ." He closed his eyes and said no more.

"Brought on by what?" probed Tao-ching anxiously.

"Let's not talk about it." Yung-tse opened his eyes and shook his head weakly.

"Please explain what is the matter," said Tao-ching, shaking him gently and frowning in perplexity. "Don't stutter and stammer and talk in riddles. If you've something to say, for goodness' sake speak out!"

Yung-tse's eyes became moist and tears rolled down his cheeks, while his long, thin fingers gripped Tao-ching's hand painfully. She watched him, bewildered, till he broke the silence and whispered solemnly:

"Tao-ching, tell me the truth! If you don't love me, if I'm not good enough for you. . . . Tell me the truth!"

For some minutes Tao-ching did not understand — she only looked blankly at him. When at last his meaning dawned upon her she seized his hands and held them tightly, her heart a prey to conflicting emotions.

"Don't say such things, Yung-tse!" she cried. "You mustn't talk like that!" She turned her head to wipe away her own tears — he was ill for love of her!

The suggestion of a smile hovered at the corners of Yung-tse's mouth, but suppressing it quickly he pulled Tao-ching towards him and made her sit on his bed. Then he proceeded sadly:

"No, you don't really love me. If I can't have you by my side, my life seems like a yellow leaf withering away. . . . Tao-ching, save me! I can't live without you!"

This was an agonizing avowal of love, coming from one who had saved her life! In his arms, melted by his tears, she agreed to live with him.

So a new life began.

On her last day at the Wangs' house Tao-ching felt all the fearfulness and uncertainty of a young bride about to leave home. Late that night, when her few belongings were packed, she took Hsiao-yen's hand and said softly:

"Hsiao-yen, tomorrow I shall start on a new kind of life. I'm a little afraid. But what else can I do? I've no alternative. I hope you will study harder than ever so that soon your wish will come true. You're luckier than I am. I don't know what the future holds for me. . . ." She hung her head sadly.

"But you are far braver than I am!" exclaimed Hsiao-yen with a smile, hastily wiping away the tears that misted her glasses. "You've always shown plenty of courage in dealing with the problems of your life. I admire the way you've tackled them and you know I sympathize with your difficulties, but I can't quite make up my mind about Old Yu. Are you sure you really understand him? What guarantee have you that he'll always be true to you? Can you really trust him?" Hsiao-yen voiced her suspicions like a faithful big sister, anxious to safeguard her from harm.

Tao-ching threw up her head, her eyes bright and stubborn as a child's.

"Hsiao-yen, do you think that one must ride in a flower-bedecked car and have three match-makers and six witnesses for a successful marriage? I've no patience with those vulgar ceremonies. Have you ever read Isadora Duncan's autobiography? That's a fascinating book! Isadora Duncan was a great modern dancer in the West, and had to make her own way from childhood. She came up against innumerable difficulties, but never lost heart or gave in to the powers of evil. She hated all the old, outworn moral standards. When her two children fell into the Rhine and were drowned, she went through such anguish that she decided she must have another child — though she had no husband then. So she waited, lying on the beach, until a handsome young man came along. Then she rose and went up to him. . . ."

Prim and proper Hsiao-yen burst out laughing when she heard Tao-ching, usually so sparing of words, relate this romantic tale in all earnestness.

"But you're taking this very casually, you naughty girl! What will you do if Yung-tse deserts you?"

"I'm not afraid!" Tao-ching laughed briefly. "I don't depend on men. I can live without him. Besides . . . you don't know how he loves me!" She flushed at these words and smiled.

Hsiao-yen chuckled. "You mean that? How could I possibly know?"

As a matter of fact, Hsiao-yen thought the world of Tao-ching, who was intelligent and fond of books. She knew her friend had more general knowledge and knew much more about literature than she did. Moreover she was sorry for her and indignant at the way her family had treated her. So she was ready to do anything she could to help her. But she did not approve of Tao-ching's lack of restraint, her violent approach to many problems and her unconventional views, which seemed to Hsiao-yen unfitting in a girl. However, she could never defeat Tao-ching in argument, and when the two friends had occasional disagreements, it was always Hsiao-yen who laughingly gave way.

"Well, Tao-ching, from the bottom of my heart I wish you happiness!" Hsiao-yen had again to remove her glasses to wipe away the tears.

Tao-ching was deeply touched too. She took Hsiao-yen's hand and smiling bravely said:

"Hsiao-yen, don't worry about me! I shan't go to the bad — not while I'm trying to deserve a friend like you! . . ."

Tao-ching and Yung-tse set up house together in two neat little rooms in a hostel built round a courtyard. The top of their bookcase was graced with an old porcelain vase, the desk by an asparagus fern in a pot. On one wall hung a picture of Tolstoy in his old age, on another an eight-inch half-length photograph of the young couple, who smiled down from a handsome frame on all observers. In a word, the small, old-fashioned rooms had been made to look warm and friendly, simple yet attractive, and suggestive, in some way, of spring.

Yung-tse was a happy man. He congratulated himself on his good luck in winning such an untamable girl, at finding a mistress so beautiful and so young. Before going out in the mornings he would hold her in his arms and looking into her loving eyes would murmur:

"Darling! Wait for me! I'll be back soon."

Feeling very much in love, he would spin out his leave-taking as if he were setting out on a long journey.

At noon when he came back, he would greet her with an embrace before sitting down at the little table which served for their meals. Complacently rubbing his jaw he would ask with a smile:

"Is lunch ready? What are we having today? Pancakes and scrambled eggs? Fine! I certainly enjoy your cooking. Our life is perfect, isn't it, Tao-ching?"

It was true that Tao-ching was also very happy. Yung-tse's constant endearments and consideration satisfied her hunger for the love denied her since childhood. She was grateful, too, for the pleasant home he had given her. Although it was small and modest, she felt at peace after the uncertainties of her life in Peitaiho. As time passed, however, she grew restless and occasionally would say to Yung-tse half in jest, "You're a university student occupied with useful studies. But what would you call me?"

He would comfort her:

"It doesn't matter. Many of our professors' wives are university graduates, some of them have even studied abroad, yet they stay at home to be good companions to their husbands and good mothers to their children. If you find life dull, Tao-ching, you can help me collect material or do some copying. Or you can learn cooking and sewing, there won't always be just the two of us, you know." Smiling he gently took her hand and kissed it.

"Yung-tse, why do you always talk like this?" Tao-ching drew back in dismay. "At Peitaiho you had so many interesting ideas. How I admired your views on life and art! But now you talk of nothing but eating, drinking and children. . . . Surely you know that to me life means much more."

"What do you want to do then?" he asked with a smile.

"I want to be independent. I want to be free."

"I have no objection!" Yung-tse quickly changed his tone. "I have always been against confining women to the kitchen. But this is a social problem. What if you can't find work outside?"

There came a day, however, when Tao-ching declared exultantly:

"I've found a job!"

"What? Found a job?" Yung-tse looked stunned, but recovered quickly and asked, "Who found it for you?"

Tao-ching explained that the father of an old schoolfellow, Li Yu-mei, managed a bookshop near the Western Arch and needed a clerk. She had been offered the post and had accepted. She was to start work the next day.

Yung-tse was thoroughly dejected that evening. He sat at his desk resting his head in his hands, unable to concentrate. Tao-ching, who was happier than usual, looked up from her book and noticed his melancholy mood. She gave him a nudge and asked:

"Why are you so depressed, Yung-tse? Don't you want me to work? It will make things easier for you financially, you know."

Yung-tse seized her hand and cried impulsively:

"Tao-ching, I hate you going out to work! In about another year I shall graduate and I've given a great deal of thought to my future — to ours, I mean. For the last few years Hu Shih and other scholars have been calling for a study of old Chinese culture, and there is definitely a future for researchers in this field. As you know, I haven't been reading so many works of pure literature recently, but I've been going to the library to dig deep into this subject. I chose my course with the same idea in mind. Nowadays there is a good deal of unemployment, but I don't expect to have any difficulty in finding a suitable job after graduation, and we shall manage easily. That's why I'm not anxious to see my darling plunge back into the hurly-burly of life outside. You shouldn't have taken this job of assistant in a small bookshop. Aren't you

afraid you may run into that Director Hu your stepmother found for you?"

"I haven't spent any of his money, why should I be afraid of him?" With a sinking heart Tao-ching drew back her hand. "Yung-tse, I really can't understand you!" she cried. "You preach about the independence of women, yet you don't want me to go out and work. But, Yung-tse, I must go! Please don't stop me!"

Yung-tse knew her well enough to do no more than nod sadly and keep silent.

Early the next morning Tao-ching set off cheerfully from the east city to the Western Arch to take up her new duties. The first day everything went well, the work was not hard and allowed her time to dip into many new books. The second and third days brought her annoyances, however, and by the fourth day she felt she could stand it no longer. On the sixth she resigned. What had happened was this, on the second day some loafers and rowdies drifted into the shop, making a great commotion but buying nothing. The arrival of a beautiful young assistant had aroused their vulgar curiosity and they swarmed round the shop like flies. On the sixth morning this doggerel was posted on the shop door:

Oh, this bookshop here isn't bad at all,
With a beautiful girl at our beck and call;
Give me a kiss or a friendly look,
And I'll pay a whole dollar for a ten-cent book!

Quivering with anger, Tao-ching promptly gave notice. She received no pay for the few days during which she had swallowed so many insults. This experience made her feel depressed for many days, and she began to despair of ever finding a job. Yung-tse, of course, was pleased to think that he had gained another victory.

During these long empty days Tao-ching learned that her old school friend, Chen Wei-ju, was happily married and one day feeling in a more cheerful mood she went to see her. She was shocked, however, to find her friend with her hair waved in the latest style, her face heavily made up. Dressed in a pink silk gown and wearing embroidered satin slippers, the simple schoolgirl had turned into a lady of fashion.

Tao-ching, sitting ill at ease on the couch, wondered, "Why has she changed in this ridiculous way?"

Wei-ju was very happy to see her. Taking her old friend by the hand, she called affectedly towards an inner room:

"Nurse, bring some tea! An honoured guest has come!"

Suppressing her real feelings, and looking about the attractively furnished room, Tao-ching asked Wei-ju what she had been doing during the last year or so.

"My dear, I'll tell you!" Wei-ju dabbed her lips with a filmy handkerchief, smiling complacently. "After we parted, I didn't take the entrance examinations to any university. My cousin introduced Mr. Pan to me, and soon after that we were married. My husband's a graduate of Nankai University, and the assistant-manager of the Yen Yeh Commercial Bank. We're doing quite well. He bought this place last year so that we could set up house together — see, the furniture alone cost more than two thousand yuan. He's a good sort, my dear, not like most men who once they have money play round with dancing girls. He always comes straight home from his office. A month ago I had a chubby little baby. We call him Pei-pei. He's a darling, and his father dotes on him." She rattled on cheerfully, patting her hair now and then, then swayed to her feet and called out:

"Nurse! Bring Pei-pei here! I want our guest to see him."

She sat down while waiting for the child, looked at Tao-ching and asked solicitously:

"My dear, are you still as eccentric as ever? With your good looks you could find a husband even better off than mine." Holding her handkerchief to her rouged lips, she continued, "Someone told me you're living with a university student. Is that true?"

Tao-ching nodded without a word.

"Oh, but why? I don't understand. . . ." She frowned with dismay and arched her slender black eyebrows. "When we were at school, I was never as good at lessons as you were,

but now. . . . Why, why don't you think. . . . Pei-pei's father. . . ." Tao-ching broke into this disjointed speech to say:

"Why, Wei-ju, how you've changed!" From her seat on the couch she looked sadly at her friend's arched eyebrows and said: "Do you remember, walking by that little stream not far from school, how we condemned this dark, wicked society and swore to be true to ourselves no matter what happened? When my stepmother refused to give me money to stay on at school because she wanted me to marry a rich man, you were so upset that you cried and you encouraged me not to give in. Surely you remember all this? Then why are you urging me to marry a rich man? Is it possible to love a man just because he's rich?"

Wei-ju was just taking the baby from the nurse; but she thrust it back into the woman's arms, saying, "Take Pei-pei away!" Flushing as she turned to stare in astonishment at Tao-ching, she retorted rather sharply:

"What's come over you? Don't misunderstand me, please! I'm not urging you to marry a rich man. You're free to do whatever you like." Looking at the floor, she sighed. "At school we all had girlish illusions, but fancy your still taking them so seriously! One has to be a bit more practical. . . ."

Seeing that Tao-ching had risen to leave she stopped talking. This unhappy encounter ended their friendship.

Chapter 10

It was winter. One snowy Sunday not long before the lunar New Year, Yung-tse came home loaded with parcels — tender roast duck and cooked pork from the best caterers in Peiping, tasty rolls and pastries and a bottle of brandy. As Tao-ching relieved him of these packages, she asked curiously:

"Why did you buy all these expensive things today?"

He kissed her cheek tenderly and told her gaily:

"I've invited someone important to a meal. Come, let's tidy up the room and lay the table."

"Who's this important person? I'm not here to wait on anyone important." She pouted, refusing to move.

He put her hand to his face. "Feel my cheek, it's like ice, because I've been shopping in the bitter cold, yet you haven't even a kind word for me. Come and make me warm!"

Tao-ching smiled and drew back her hand. "Tell me who's coming!"

"You'll soon find out," he teased. "He can do us a great service. You must be a perfect hostess and entertain him well. . . . Shall we put these things out on the plates? You can warm up the rolls in the steamer later. No, wait! Get those two Sung Dynasty cups out first. This is an occasion for our best and oldest porcelain."

They had just straightened the room and laid the table when a voice outside called: "Does Young Master Yu of Yangchuang Village live here?"

Tao-ching made haste to open the door. Outside stood a frail, shabby old man, who slapped the snow and dust from his clothes as he quavered:

"Please . . . does Young Master Yu live here?"

"Come in!" Before she could lead the old man in, Yung-tse joined them, asking:

"Whom do you want?"

At the sight of Yung-tse, the old man hurried forward cheerfully, a smile on his wrinkled face. "Ah, Young Master, so you do live here! I had a hard time finding you." Without waiting for any further invitation he stepped inside. Over his shoulder was a bag with two pockets, the kind North China peasants take to a fair.

"Who are you?" Yung-tse raised his arm to bar the way.

"Me? Why, I'm Third Uncle Wei who lives opposite your home. Don't you remember me?" The old man's thin, lined face clouded and he stared blankly at Yung-tse.

"Oh, it's you, Wei the Third." Yung-tse seemed to have just remembered. He beckoned him in, explaining to Tao-ching: "This is one of our old tenants from home."

As the old man was travel-stained and weary, Tao-ching guessed that he was cold and hungry, and ran for a stool and made him sit near the fire.

"Have you eaten?" she asked. "You must share . . ." before she could say "our meal" Yung-tse flashed her a look. Remembering the delicacies on the table and the important visitor shortly expected, she nodded and went out to buy some cakes which she then thrust into the old peasant's hands, urging him to eat.

"You're too good. Don't go to any trouble. . . ." With rough country courtesy he accepted the food and started eating. Yung-tse disappeared through the cloth-curtained door into the inner room, while Tao-ching kept the old man company. He ate ravenously and soon finished the cakes, after which he took out his tobacco pouch and pipe. Lighting up, he looked gratefully from narrowed eyes at Tao-ching, remarking with a smile:

"You're the Miss Lin who taught in our village, aren't you?"

"Yes, uncle. So you still remember me?"

"I should think so! My eldest grandson, Puppy, was one of your pupils. When he used to come home from school, he always told us what a good teacher Miss Lin was. He said Miss Lin wanted him to fight the Japanese."

Yung-tse cut short the old man's remarks by reappearing with some books and asking:

"Uncle Wei, what did you come to see me about? Tell me quickly. I must be off now to a lecture."

The old man was so taken aback that the pipe in his hand began to tremble. Slowly, with a great effort at self-control, he knocked out the ashes and stowed both pipe and pouch back in his pocket, but did not answer the question directly.

"Master Yu," he began, "you're a man of education. You'll understand. . . . I farm that land in the hollow which belongs to your folk, but it's been flooded for three years in succession. I've had no crops, and my wife has died of starvation. Hunger drove my son, your friend Wu-fu, to join the army. There are only Puppy and his mother left at home — I had to harden my heart and sell Wu-fu's sister Yu-lai. We don't know where she is now. . . ."

The tale of the old man's troubles seemed to be a long one, so Yung-tse struck the table and cut in again:

"Uncle Wei, tell me what has brought you here. If it's nothing urgent, you can stay until I come back, but I must be going now."

"Don't go, sir! Not yet awhile! I shan't keep you long." The old man rose abruptly and reached out as if to catch hold of Yung-tse, crying out brokenly:

"Poor folk like us can't make a living anyhow these days. I haven't been able to pay the rent for two years. . . . Your father is pressing me. . . ." He shook his head and sighed. All at once he began fumbling in his pockets and after a while produced a crumpled envelope. Holding this high, he presented it with shaking hands to Yung-tse. "See! This is a letter from your friend Wu-fu in the army. How happy it made us! He told us he was stationed at Changhsingtien outside Peiping, and I came here to see him!"

"What use was that?" Yung-tse smiled at the old peasant's folly.

"You're right, sir. It was no use. I came several hundred *li* and had a hard time borrowing four yuan for the train fare; but when I got there, he was gone. His unit's been sent away, I don't know where. . . . All of us at home were hoping we could find him and get him to help us out. If he'd done well enough to pay your father the rent, that would have been even better. But Heaven is blind, Heaven is blind! We don't know where they have sent him! In troubled times like these, fighting may break out any day. One bullet, and my poor boy. . . ." He sank down on a stool, gulping painfully. Tao-ching's heart went out to him and, when the old man wiped his eyes with the back of one grimy hand, she hastened to get him a towel, but before she could put it into his hand, Yung-tse snatched it from her with a quizzical smile and turned to the old man.

"Cheer up, Uncle Wei! You say you have no money for your fare home? Never mind, I'll give you a yuan towards it and you can borrow the rest from other people, but go home as soon as you can." Yung-tse took a one-yuan note from his pocket and laid it on the table beside the old man, smiling at Tao-ching as if to say, "See how generous I am!"

Old Wei's face had lit up at the start of this speech, but it twitched painfully as soon as he saw that he was being sent away with only one yuan. After looking steadily at Yung-tse for a moment, he turned to Tao-ching who was standing near by.

"Master Yu, do a good deed!" he begged, his lips trembling. "My family's dying of starvation one after another. One yuan — why, one yuan won't even take me home! I know you're a kind man, sir. When you were a child you gave Wu-fu white steamed rolls. . . ." His bleary old eyes filled with tears. "Let me have nine or ten yuan, sir, and you'll be saving our lives! Don't send me back empty-handed to Puppy and his mother!"

The old man's tears were flowing freely, but Yung-tse, who had always seemed to Tao-ching the embodiment of kindness, retorted roughly and coldly:

"Uncle Wei, if you tenants don't pay your rent, how can my father send money to me? I'm a student, I don't draw any salary. Even one yuan is more than I can afford." He glanced surreptitiously in Tao-ching's direction, but she had left the room, and before he could say more the old man had risen shakily to his feet, and heaved his bag to his shoulder as if it weighed half a ton. Limping to the door he muttered:

"All right, all right. When a man's in trouble, that's always the way it goes."

Yung-tse pocketed the one-yuan note left on the table and did not trouble to see the visitor out.

"Wait a bit, uncle!" The old peasant was stopped at the gate by Tao-ching, who pressed a note into his hand. "Here's ten yuan for you, uncle! I know it's not enough, but. . . ." She hesitated, glanced back towards their room and added: "Do you know your way to the station? Be careful with this money! There may be pickpockets on the train!"

The old man's tears fell in a torrent again, as he groped desperately in his clothes for a safe hiding-place for the note. Finally he muttered:

"There are kind hearts everywhere! Kind hearts. . . . Bless you, bless you! Our family will never know how to thank you!"

This scene had brought tears to Tao-ching's eyes too, reminding her suddenly of her own white-haired grandfather, her mother's father, and all that he had been through. Poor people, poor tenant farmers — was there no end to the misery in the world? . . . She stood heavy-hearted beside the gate while the old man walked slowly away with many a backward glance. Returning to their room when he had passed out of sight she saw that Yung-tse was angry.

"You gave the old man money?" he asked accusingly, his brows knitted in a frown.

Tao-ching looked at him steadily and nodded, "Yes."

"How much?"

"Ten yuan."

"Playing Lady Bountiful with my money, are you? What do you mean by it?" This was the first time he had spoken harshly to her, and Tao-ching could hardly believe her ears. She leaped to her feet and faced him with blazing eyes. "What! You talk of nothing but humanity and right, yet this is how you treat the poor! Don't worry about your money — I'll pay you back!" She threw herself on the bed, covered her head with the quilt and started crying as if her heart would break. Wretched and disillusioned, she could not hold back her tears. Was this the man she loved so dearly?

When Yung-tse saw how deeply she was hurt, he forgot his own annoyance, put his arms around her and begged her forgiveness. In an instant, he was all affection and kindness again.

"Forgive me, darling!" he pleaded. "I was wrong. I was thinking about our budget. I'm not really selfish. That's why the old man came to me for a loan. He knows I'm not like my father. . . ." After a pause he continued: "Please don't be angry, Tao-ching. I wouldn't mind giving him all the fifty yuan I've just received from home, not to say ten, to make you happy."

Tao-ching was not paying much attention, but her expression was less stormy and her tears had stopped. He pulled her to her feet, smoothed her hair and patted her tear-stained cheeks with a powder-puff. "I don't think Chang Chang, who painted his wife's eyebrows for her, was such an affectionate husband as I," he boasted. "Stop sulking now, and I'll tell you an amusing story. When I was a boy, I was friends with old Wei's son, Wu-fu. Our families lived opposite each other, and we often went together to nearby pools to splash around and play. I was born when my father was over fifty, and my people tried to coddle me. Swimming wasn't allowed, but I went on the sly; and if anyone came looking for me, Wu-fu and the other boys milled around me in the water and hid me from sight. I sometimes took steamed rolls from our kitchen for my friends. One day when a fresh batch had just been made, I grabbed the lot through the window as soon as the cook's back was turned, stuffed them into a bag and ran off. When the cook looked round and saw that the rolls had gone, he was convinced that a fox-fairy must have been there! Wasn't that a joke?"

"A great joke," answered Tao-ching coldly. "Why weren't you so generous today? Why wouldn't you share these good things with the old man?"

"Who says I'm not generous?" he retorted smugly. "When my father dies and I become head of the family, I shall do like Tolstoy — give all my land to the peasants."

"Give?" Tao-ching sniffed and narrowed her eyes. "After sucking the blood of the peasants all these years, you'll suddenly become their benefactor, I suppose!"

Yung-tse did not reply. He was busy thinking about the "important" visitor and had not even heard her.

Soon after this storm had subsided their guest arrived. He was sturdy and strongly built, dressed in baggy trousers and gym shoes, and looked like an athlete. His large eyes looked remarkably shrewd. Yung-tse introduced him cordially to Tao-ching:

"This is Lo Ta-fang, a fellow-student in the History Department. . . . This is Lin Tao-ching, my sweetheart."

Lo Ta-fang held out a large hand, shook Tao-ching's hand warmly and smiled.

"Very pleased to meet you. Are you neither studying nor working now?"

Although Tao-ching flushed, she liked Lo Ta-fang's straightforward manner and concern for others even at a first meeting. He was behaving more like a friend than "someone important". Smiling, she hastened to pour out tea and prepare the splendid meal, listening at the same time to the young men's conversation.

"Well, Old Yu, I understand you've started working on textual research."

"Yes. In the Chinese Literature Department we have to delve into old books. I'm finding it intensely interesting. How about you? Still busy with the national-salvation movement?"

"No," replied Lo Ta-fang briefly, evading this topic to pursue the one he had raised. "You researchers into the past are doing very useful work by giving us a better knowledge of our ancient culture. This is an important contribution to scholarship, but don't let yourself be led up a blind alley by Dr. Hu Shih's talk of 'Saving the Country by Study.' That would be. . . ." He rolled his big, shrewd eyes, and throwing back his head burst into hearty laughter. "Here, friends! Let me recite you a passage from Dr. Hu's masterpiece."

"Ha, ha! Wait a bit, though, while I ask you something," put in Yung-tse with a most unnatural smile. "Isn't your father a good friend of Hu Shih's? Tell me, what are their relations now? . . . I mean to say, has Hu Shih been very busy recently?"

"You want to know about my father and Hu Shih? They are two of a kind. They are both studying Dr. Dewey's pragmatism in order to sell it to the Chinese people. For once we are willing to admit that 'where there's milk there's a mother', it will be easy for the imperialists and feudal warlords to enslave China. What of it, Old Yu? Why this interest in Hu Shih?" It seemed as if Lo's flow of words would never stop.

"I'll tell you why later. Let's have something to eat first." With a hospitable smile, Yung-tse invited the other to sit down. Seated at the small round table which was spread with a snow-white cloth, Lo Ta-fang exclaimed in amazement, "Why, what a spread! You shouldn't have got all this food and wine, Old Yu!"

"We're old school friends, it's a pleasure to entertain you. You asked the reason for my interest in Hu Shih." Yung-tse picked up the conversation where they had left off. "I've been reading the works of Wang Kuo-wei and Lo Chen-yu, and come across some problems which rather puzzle me. I was thinking of calling on Hu Shih to consult him. Although he's clearly mistaken on certain points and has come in for a good deal of criticism, as far as I can judge, he's one of our best modern Chinese scholars. We can learn a lot from his methods of research, as well as from the enormous range of his knowledge. That's why I'd like his opinion on these questions. But as he's a famous scholar and I'm a poor student, I hesitate to go to him directly. Since he and your father are such good friends, I wondered. . . ." With an ingratiating smile, he placed a succulent piece of duck on the guest's plate.

Lo Ta-fang's infectious laughter rang out again. He shook his head vehemently and answered with his mouth full:

"There are plenty of other erudite professors. Why pick on Hu Shih? Take my advice and steer clear of him! I'll introduce you to some other scholars if you like, but not to Dr. Hu Shih!"

Doing his best to hide his disappointment and annoyance, Yung-tse turned to Tao-ching and said, "Come and sit down too!" Then he asked Lo Ta-fang with a smile:

"Say, Old Lo, what's become of the other student representatives who went south with you for the big demonstration? Why don't we hear anything of your activities these days? Where is Li Meng-yu? He was a born leader, that lad."

"Of course," replied Lo Ta-fang, putting down his wine cup. "Buried as you are among old books you wouldn't hear any news of the outside world." He rose from his stool and circled the room, trying to size up this couple from its contents, and answered casually: "After our student demonstrators had been sent back to Peiping bound hand and foot on December 17, the Kuomintang authorities started to massacre the Nanking students — you must at least have heard of that. Since tearing off its mask, the Kuomintang has gone ahead with such ruthless repressive measures that our national-salvation movement has been forced to keep quiet for a while. When Li Meng-yu came back from leading that expedition, he was so hounded by the military police that he had to disappear." He paused to look at Yung-tse with clear, slightly accusing eyes. Then his glance fell on Tao-ching and he spoke more gravely: "Old Yu, you're both young — show some fight! Join in any collective action that you can! Weren't you keen enough here in Peiping, when we went south to demonstrate?"

"Yes, I was," answered Yung-tse. "Even now I am. But I don't believe that shouting slogans and shaking fists is much use. I'm choosing my own way to save the country. Come on, Old Lo, have a little more." A polite host, he pressed his guest to help himself.

"Your way is to change new foreign-style books for old Chinese books, to change a student's uniform for a long gown." Tao-ching joined in the conversation with a ripple of laughter. Oddly enough, although she was meeting him for the first time, her sympathies were all on Lo Ta-fang's side. In some unaccountable way he reminded her of Lu Chia-chuan whom she had met in Peitaiho.

Yung-tse had previously worn a student's uniform, but since cultivating an interest in old books he preferred a more "national style" of dress. In the summer he wore a silk or glazed cotton gown and thick-soled cloth slippers; in winter, a padded silk gown under one of plain blue cloth, a broad-brimmed hat and thick, boat-like boots of the kind usually worn by elderly men. Tao-ching disliked this outfit which made him look old before his time; but he insisted on wearing it, believing that it showed his patriotism. According to his ideas, a study of the classics and adherence to the national costume were concrete expressions of his love for the country. Theories of this sort, which kept cropping up in his talk, had moved Tao-ching to speak as she did.

"Don't you believe her!" Yung-tse cautioned Lo Ta-fang with a smile. "She's frustrated because she can't find a job and is working it off by finding fault with me. This society is frustrating, I admit. I've run all over the place to find her work, wearing myself to a shadow, but all in vain. So she just has to waste her time at home washing and cooking for me. Yes, nowadays 'graduation means unemployment'. I'm already worrying about finding a position myself after graduation. You won't have any trouble, Old Lo — your father has influence."

"That doesn't mean a thing to me! I'm not counting on my father's help. As a matter of fact, we don't see eye to eye and each goes his own way." Lo Ta-fang rose to leave. "Thank you both. I must be going."

Neither Yung-tse nor Tao-ching made any move to detain him, but at the door he turned back, saying:

"I meant to recite a passage from Dr. Hu Shih's masterpiece. Let me do that before I leave.

> You can't endure it? You can't stand the stimulating influence of the outside world? Your fellow-students are all shouting calls to arms and you can't resist the temptation to join in or bear their scorn if you don't? Do you sit alone in the library feeling embarrassed? Is your mind disturbed? . . . Let me tell you one or two stories. . . ."

Lo Ta-fang stood there with staring eyes and a solemn face, wagging his head as this flood of words poured from him. Since Yung-tse was blowing his nose, it was hard to tell how much he heard. Tao-ching was doing her best to keep from laughing. After a little, Lo Ta-fang stopped for breath and said, "When Dr. Hu had finished condoling with the sorrows of youth, he held up the examples of Goethe and Fichte, urging others to do as they did. Even though enemy troops are at the city wall you must go on studying calmly. . . . No, Old Yu, don't let them fool you, study alone is not going to save the country."

With a nod and a chuckle he was gone. Tao-ching went smiling to the door to see him off while Yung-tse, doing his best to control his feelings, escorted him to the main gate. When he returned to the house he threw himself down on the bed and lay there in silence, staring at the ceiling.

Tao-ching sat at the table till she became aware of his depression. Then she walked slowly to his side.

"Why should Lo Ta-fang's visit upset you so? His advice was well-meant." She thought Yung-tse was sulking because Lo had made fun of him.

Yung-tse shook his head as he lay there. "It isn't that," he said. "Who is he that I should mind what he says? What really depresses me, you see, is the fact that I've got a home; I've got you, and no doubt we shall have children. I wouldn't have worried about that jaundiced wife of mine who died, but for you I do. In a few months I shall graduate, but there's still no job forthcoming, and my family is bound to stop my allowance. How am I going to keep you?" He sighed and fixed beady, anxious eyes on Tao-ching. "That's why I spent nearly five yuan on wine and food and asked Lo Ta-fang over for a talk. I hoped that through his father I might reach Hu Shih, or that his father might find a job for me. I never expected the fellow to be so full of big Marxist theories. Never mind! I'll find another way out. Come to me, darling. Come and comfort me!"

He sat up and held out his arms, but Tao-ching drew back with a hurt look in her eyes. His totally different treatment of their two visitors that day had revealed him in his true colours. Bitterness and disillusion filled her heart.

The raptures of love and its enchanting rainbow-coloured illusions had gradually lost their charm. Little by little, both she and Yung-tse were being awakened from their dream by harsh reality. Tao-ching seldom stirred outside their two small rooms, her liaison with Yung-tse making her reluctant to seek out old friends — she was even drifting away from Wang Hsiao-yen. Her daily life was a round of washing up, marketing, cooking, laundering, sewing and other household tasks. As the days passed she gave less and less time to study. Her dreams of the future, once as unbounded as the sea and sky, were also fading away, leaving her depressed and frustrated. The realization that Yung-tse was not the fine character she had thought him was the worst blow of all. The chivalry and poetic quality which had made him seem superior in her eyes to all others had at last faded and vanished. He had proved to be selfish, vulgar and petty-minded, concerned only with the trivial affairs of life. Ah, into what impasse had fate forced her again?

Chapter 11

It was New Year's Eve by the old calendar.

Through the papered, latticed window of a room in a Peking-style house used as a hostel by some Peking University students, came light and the buzz of voices — a dozen or more young men and girls were engaged in animated discussion there.

In that well-heated room, thick with smoke, all faces were turned towards the hostess, Pai Li-ping, with the bright lively black eyes and attractive smile. Standing beside a square table, she raised her wine glass and invited her guests to drink with her.

"We homeless waifs are gathered here tonight to celebrate the New Year. Though the Japanese bandits won't let us join our folks at home in the Northeast, they can't stop us having a good time tonight. So, drink, kids, drink!"

Though Li-ping was younger than several of the others in the room, she liked to play the elder sister and invariably addressed her guests as "kids". She came from the province of Kirin and was a student in the Department of Law at Peking University. She was a warm-hearted girl who loved company. Since the September the Eighteenth Incident, like other students from the Northeast she had been cut off from her home; so she had asked some fellow-provincials, fellow-students and friends to her room to celebrate the New Year with her.

She had no sooner proposed a toast to a happy New Year than a robust, rudy-faced, handsome lad bounded to the table, seized the glass from her hand and held it high above his head.

"I protest!" he shouted. "On this New Year's Eve, I want to raise my voice in protest against the reactionary Kuomintang and the national government! It's Chiang Kai-shek's policy of non-resistance that is responsible for the loss of the three northeastern provinces, and is causing thirty million of our countrymen to go through hell and live like slaves. I protest, I strongly oppose the Nanking government!"

The speaker was Hsu Ning, one of the Peking University students who had gone south to demonstrate. He was the one who had read out the slogans on the southward-bound train. While shouting, he surveyed the room with solemn, half-shut eyes as if eager to note the effect of his protest. With a wry smile, Li-ping gave him a gentle slap.

"Don't be such a fool, Hsu Ning! Why shout yourself hoarse? Chiang Kai-shek won't hear your protest, but his spies may. . . . Never mind him, kids. Let's drink!"

Her words seemed to fall on deaf ears, and some of the young people started raging against the reactionary government and its policy of non-resistance; others sighed, moved by the festive occasion to thoughts of home. A slender seventeen-year-old girl added to the general confusion by throwing herself on to the bed, where she shook with sobs. Li-ping hurried to her side and exclaimed:

"Don't cry, Hsiu-yu! You're thinking of your mother, aren't you? Her death was tragic and we must avenge it! . . ." She continued in a lower voice, "Don't cry, there's a good girl! There are so many of us in the same position, no homes nor parents left, orphaned and widowed by the Japanese devils. We'll settle scores with them some day! You know, the Northeastern Anti-Japanese Volunteers are putting up a brilliant fight now against the enemy! Sooner or later I'm sure we'll win back our homes. . . ."

Though Li-ping had seen more of life, the thought of her home and the sufferings of her parents under enemy occupation made her join her friend on the bed and mingle their tears.

An oppressive silence reigned.

Tao-ching was one of the guests at the celebration.

She lived in the same hostel, and Lo Ta-fang, who often dropped in to see Li-ping, had introduced the two girls to each other. Yung-tse had gone home for the New Year holidays, and Tao-ching, not wanting to accompany him, had stayed on at the hostel. So the hospitable Li-ping had invited her to the party.

She sat alone in a corner, quietly listening because Li-ping and Lo Ta-fang were the only two people she knew in the room. She moved over to Hsiu-yu and Li-ping, eager to help but not knowing how to comfort them. Lo Ta-fang, usually so irrepressible, was sitting quietly by the window, head lowered. Hsu Ning was silent after his indignant outburst.

" 'Festivals double men's longing for home.' Tonight my parents must be thinking of their son so far away. Oh, beautiful Sunghua River! Are your clear waves as lovely as ever?"

The speaker whose maudlin sentiments shattered the silence was a short young man with unkempt hair and dressed in a shabby Western suit. He had obviously drunk more than was good for him.

The others turned to look at him as he sat at the square table, his glass raised high. Li-ping wiped her eyes and hurried over to him. Snatching his glass and waving it before his face, she cried, "Shame on you, Yu Yi-min! Has the wine muddled you?"

But scarcely had the hostess restored order in this part of the room than a greater commotion broke out in another. This was caused by a man of about thirty clad in a grey cotton-padded gown. His tousled hair badly needed cutting, and his mulish face was ugly and long.

"No politics, ladies and gentlemen!" he cried. "Life should be freer — freer! Life is like flowing water, it passes in a twinkling. . . . I can't bear it, I can't bear it. . . . Life is a dream with hardly time enough for joy. I can't bear it! . . ."

Unable to put up with this moaning, Hsu Ning and Hsiu-yu intervened simultaneously. Hsiu-yu sprang to her feet and advanced towards him, pointing at the tip of his nose and frowning angrily as she demanded:

"Is the great artist so drunk? Evidently you're so befuddled that there's nothing Chinese left in you. Don't you understand the times we're living in? Our homes have been destroyed by the enemy, our country is in ruins, yet you mouth such decadent nonsense! The Japanese, I assure you, are trying to enslave our country. Come down from your ivory tower! It's time to wake up!"

Now it was Hsu Ning's turn. Flourishing one arm and running his fingers through his thick black hair, he took up the subject like a practised orator, booming:

"Wake up, Wang Chien-fu! Don't you know that Jehol is threatened? And that means the whole of North China is in danger! How can you hold forth in that nihilist way?"

Wang Chien-fu sniggered in a shame-faced way, craning his neck to stare at Hsu Ning and Hsiu-yu with drunken, blood-shot eyes, and looking so like a beaten cur ready to slink off with its tail between its legs, that everyone else in the room burst out laughing.

After a while the talk again became general.

"Li-ping, let's speak about what lies closest to our hearts!" begged Yu Yi-min with a sidelong glance at his hostess. "Your place shouldn't be like a tea-house with a notice 'No Politics Here' on every wall."

Li-ping smiled. "On a night like this, I'm sure all of you have a lot to say. It isn't that I'm against talking politics. I don't want all of you to feel depressed. . . ." Her eyes grew moist once more and she hurriedly turned her head away, but a moment later she faced her guests again and continued:

"Since the September the Eighteenth Incident, we homeless young people from the Northeast have had a hard time. We

should enjoy ourselves at New Year, but we can't." After a thoughtful pause she went on, "Well, let me tell you a story to cheer you up. When I've finished, each of you can tell one. Now Hsu Ning, you imp. I warn you not to interrupt or play any tricks!" Li-ping winked and smiled as she saw that everyone was watching her. She proceeded, "After the September the Eighteenth Incident, the eight hundred thousand workers of Shanghai formed an association to resist Japan and save China, and representatives were sent to the Nanking government demanding that troops be despatched immediately to fight the Japanese and that arms be issued to the workers so that they could also resist the enemy. That was the time when our Peiping students, in co-ordination with students all over the country, went to Nanking to petition the government. Chiang Kai-shek thought up a trick to cope with the situation. He summoned the students to the Central Military Academy and made a speech. Listen to what he said, and see what an ass he is!"

Li-ping, who was keen on amateur dramatics, showed all the poise of an actress as she began to imitate Chiang Kai-shek's gestures and his mixed accent: "Now — the government — is making active preparations — to resist Japan. If — in three years — we fail to recover our lost territory and put our country on her feet again — I, Chiang Kai-shek —" Li-ping sawed at her throat with one hand, her eyes glassy. "I, Chiang Kai-shek — will yield my head to the axe, to appease the anger of the people."

Li-ping's vivid take-off of Chiang Kai-shek formed such a striking contrast to her own grace and charm that her guests started laughing uproariously. Even Wang Chien-fu, who sat with his head bent, sighing, could not help laughing. Yu Yi-min, a glass in his hand, sprang to his feet.

Before any of the others had time to speak, Hsu Ning struck the table with his fist and shouted, "Who has ever been taken in by Chiang Kai-shek's lies? No one! Not long after he made that notorious speech, students from all over the country began making their way to Nanking to stage a big demonstration. Peking University took the lead in the famous December the Fifth Movement. After that, hundreds of students from Shanghai and Peiping went to Nanking and, with the students from Central University, surrounded and stormed the Kuomintang headquarters and wrecked the office of the *Central Daily.* When the students reached the government buildings and shouted, 'Down with the traitorous government!' the authorities were so terrified that they shut their big iron gates.... Well, all this happened on December 17 two years ago. Remember?" So saying, Hsu Ning brandished his strong fist in front of Wang Chien-fu's mulish face, making him jerk his head back in fright, and causing another roar of laughter.

"Li-ping, Hsu Ning, how exciting you make it all sound! Well, since we've nothing to do this New Year's Eve, after all this drinking let me tell you another story." Lo Ta-fang had been looking rather downcast, as if something were weighing on his mind, but he now brightened up as he let loose a torrent of words.

"Hsu Ning, do you remember how, when we demonstrated in Nanking, you and Lu Chia-chuan were 'treated with special consideration' while Li Meng-yu led his troops to storm the garrison headquarters? Unfortunately a hundred and eighty-five of us had been tied up and sent to the Ming Tomb Barracks, where we had a taste of prison life. At night, the wind moaned and the rain beat down as we slept on the cold, cold ground, while everything else around was as silent as the grave. How could cultured young scholars like us sleep after being suddenly turned into gaol-birds? Some gnashed their teeth, others sighed and groaned, while still others, inspired by the occasion, tossed off impromptu verses.... As you all know, I have a certain talent that way, so that dismal night Old Hsu and I made up some doggerel verses to cheer up the others who were cold, hungry and sleepless. Soon our masterpiece was on everybody's lips. In the darkness there came calls: 'Let's sing the Peking University song, chaps!' 'Encore!' So we transformed the dark and dismal barracks into an opera house.

Miss Jeanette MacDonald's golden voice raised in song could not have been more welcome than our rough rhymes."

"Aiya, aiya, Brother Lo! What's this stirring masterpiece you're talking about? Let's hear it. We can hardly wait!" Hsiu-yu was enchanted, and her big round eyes sparkled with wonder. This long harangue was taxing her patience.

Lo Ta-fang laughed loud and long. "My dear young friends, you're easily taken in. I'm no poet, and what I wrote was the crudest stuff. We just recited to kill time, you know, and to raise everyone's spirits." Then narrowing his eyes and tossing his head, he chanted with humorous bravado:

From Peking University are we,
All fellow students fearless as can be;
With waving flags we've marched upon Nanking
To save our country from the enemy!

"That's not all. Here's some more for you."

They trussed and tied us hand and foot with ropes,
With rifle butts they dealt us many a blow,
Two days we would not take a bite of food.
Are we down-hearted? — No!
Today though prisoners we may be,
From Peking University are we;
We fear no foe, nor yet the KMT!

"That's the spirit! Encore!" shouted a new voice. Startled, they looked towards the door and saw a young man on the threshold. Those who knew him called out in welcome:

"Old Lu, here you are at last!"

Li-ping went up to him, and with an engaging smile took his hand. "Lu Chia-chuan, it's ages since I saw you!"

Tao-ching's heart missed a beat. Wasn't this young man of medium build with the fine bearing, bright clever eyes, thick dark hair, and kind honest face the one she had met while teaching at Peitaiho? Brief as their conversation had been, this gifted and intelligent student had made an impression on her and she had thought of him sometimes. Lu Chia-chuan did not seem to remember her, and she was too shy to accost him.

Having greeted them, Lu Chia-chuan sat down on a stool, turned to Lo Ta-fang, and with a smile said:

"Go on with your masterpiece, fellow. When you're through, it'll be my turn to entertain the company."

"All right then, let me carry on with my tale." Lo Ta-fang smiled broadly, cleared his throat and continued, "It rained harder and harder as the night went on. With the general morale raised, people gradually calmed down, and by midnight there was nothing to be seen in the Ming Tomb Barracks but stray lamps flickering in the distance. Nothing could be heard but the sound of sentries squelching through the mud as they made their rounds. Suddenly our pickets came to report: 'The authorities have sent more than thirty trucks and over a thousand troops and policemen to ship us back to Peiping by force.' Aroused by this startling news, we gave the lead in again shouting slogans." He had been speaking almost casually, but now he grew serious and his voice, though low, rang out clear and strong. "We shouted more loudly than ever. 'We won't go! We refuse to go! You must set us free first! You want promotion, riches and the blood of the people! We want happiness and freedom for our motherland! Freedom! Freedom! We won't go!' " Lo Ta-fang's face was flushed as he shook his fist and shouted. His listeners remained silent. Not one of them laughed, for their young blood was seething. All were looking intently at Lo Ta-fang, and many had tears in their eyes.

Silence reigned in the room.

Wang Chien-fu of the mulish face left early. After a few moments the others began to eat and drink and chatter freely.

"Let me tell you something amusing." Lu Chia-chuan smiled at the company. "I heard it only recently, and I think it's as good a joke as Chiang Kai-shek's boast to the students at the Central Military Academy that our lost territories would be recovered in three years. A few days ago, when the situation in Jehol became critical, T. V. Soong, Chiang's brother-in-law, flew to the provincial capital, Chengteh. The moment he stepped from the plane, he delivered a speech full of noble sentiments to the garrison troops of Jehol. He said, 'Just go on fighting! I promise you that the central government will stand by you. Wherever you go, there T. V. Soong will also be. Even if you drive the enemy to the uttermost ends of the earth, there you will also find T. V. Soong. . . .' But, on the first day of the battle of Jehol, and when the enemy was still far away, this big-shot Soong, instead of going with the troops to the uttermost ends of the earth, flew back to Nanking so secretly that nobody had any idea he had left."

Strange to say, instead of evoking laughter as Li-ping's story had done, Lu Chia-chuan's anecdote seemed to tear open old wounds and revive sad memories. The others looked at each other without a word, and it was not until some minutes later that Hsiu-yu broke the silence to say softly:

"That's terrible! If Jehol is occupied, the whole of northern China will soon be. . . ."

Hsu Ning could control himself no longer. Clenching his fist and pushing past Hsiu-yu, he begged Lu Chia-chuan:

"Brother Lu, tell us more about what's going on! Ever since the crisis started, I have been unable to sit through any lectures."

"Yes, Old Lu! Go on!" Hsiu-yu and Li-ping called together.

"But I don't know any more than the rest of you," he said, shaking his head and smiling.

Lo Ta-fang gave him an intimate and significant look. "Go on, Old Lu, do as you're asked."

The air of expectancy and the general respect shown to Lu Chia-chuan made Tao-ching observe him more closely. She wanted to go and greet him, but was too bashful. All the others in the room knew so much more than she did, and were quite different from the people she had met in the past. They had ideals that inspired them to go forward and a sense of responsibility to their country and people. In this new environment, she was all too conscious of her own shortcomings, so she hid herself in a dark corner and kept silent.

"The present situation is enough to make your blood boil!" Lu Chia-chuan spoke quietly, glancing from face to face. "Every Chinese with any conscience has come to the end of his patience. Ever since the January the Twenty-eighth Incident* the government, though professing to be carrying on resistance during negotiations, has actually been pursuing a policy of non-resistance. Recently, after less than five days of fighting at the Shanhaikuan Pass, Ho Chu-kuo received orders to evacuate; and seven days after the fighting began in Jehol, Chengteh fell into enemy hands. Now the Japanese invaders are preparing to attack the passes along the Great Wall. . . ."

Lu Chia-chuan pulled out a handkerchief to wipe the sweat from his forehead. Gone were the composure and presence of mind he had shown a few moments earlier, as he continued in indignant, rousing tones, "The Chinese nation has reached a situation where its very existence is at stake, yet Chiang Kai-shek still maintains that our enemies are not the Japanese invaders but the 'Communist bandits'. Instead of fighting the Japanese, millions of Chinese troops are encircling the Red Army more fiercely than ever and killing Communists and young patriots. . . . But the Red Army led by Mao Tsetung and Chu Teh has already shattered this 'encirclement', which is personally directed by Chiang Kai-shek. A great victory has been scored. . . ."

" 'Better give the country to a friendly neighbouring state rather than let your own slaves have it,' " shouted Hsu Ning, shaking his fist. "Don't you know what this means? They call this 'settling troubles at home before driving out the invaders.' "

The young men and girls in the room, numbering about a dozen, embarked on a heated discussion. Tao-ching remained silent in her corner, listening intently to all that they were saying. Like gentle rain on parched rice shoots, their words flew home to her lonely, frustrated heart. Stirred by passions completely new to her, she longed to identify herself with the others and to join in their discussions; but force of habit — the habit of being alone — as well as a certain reserve, kept her silent and unnoticed in the background.

"Brother Lu!" Hsu Ning called abruptly to Lu Chia-chuan. "What do you think we should do? What is the way out for us?"

Everyone, including Tao-ching, turned to Lu Chia-chuan at this, as if their salvation was in his hands. Irrepressible anxiety clouded their faces.

Lu Chia-chuan looked at their young expectant faces, included Tao-ching in his glance, and in a low, grave voice said, "You want a way out? Of course, we're all looking for a way out — the whole Chinese nation is looking for such a way. Where does it lie? I believe our way out lies in resistance and struggle. Our way out lies in linking our own fate with that of the nation and the people. What other way is there for the intellectuals of semi-feudal and semi-colonial China? Today, our first task is to win the liberation of the Chinese nation, only then can there be liberation and a way out for us as individuals. . . ."

"To find a way out for ourselves we must first find a way out for the nation. . . . That's right." Hsu Ning brandished his fist and nodded.

"Yes, that's how it should be!" Hsiu-yu murmured, her eyes on Hsu.

"Still, I don't quite know what to do . . ." another muttered.

Again a clamour broke out as everyone voiced his or her opinion.

During the discussion that followed, Lo Ta-fang leaped to his feet and pounded the table. "Listen, everyone!" he shouted. "What's the use of empty talk? Let's do something practical and useful!" As the rest crowded round him, making heated comments, Lu Chia-chuan slipped over to where Tao-ching was sitting.

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* On January 28, 1932, the Japanese attacked Shanghai. The Kuomintang's 19th Army stationed in Shanghai and the people of Shanghai disobeyed the policy of non-resistance and fought back. But they were betrayed by Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Ching-wei.

"Lin Tao-ching!" He held out his hand. "Remember me?"

She rose swiftly to shake hands with him and, blushing, said, "Of course I do. . . . We met at Peitaiho. . . ."

"So now you're back in Peiping! When did you leave Yang-chuang Village?" Lu Chia-chuan spoke as warmly and naturally as to an old friend whom he had not seen for years.

"More than a year ago. How are you? Are you still in Peking University?" Tao-ching smiled. She too felt as if Lu Chia-chuan were a close friend.

Before he could reply, Li-ping caught sight of them and came to join in their conversation.

"Well, I never thought you two knew each other!"

"We met more than a year ago, at a most critical time, and in most beautiful surroundings." Half jokingly, Lu Chia-chuan described his first encounter with Tao-ching. "Miss Lin was arguing with my old brother-in-law. It's interesting to think back on it now!" Turning to her, he added, "By the way, what made you stop teaching there? What are you doing now?"

Tao-ching flushed to the very ears. How could she tell him that she had given up teaching, that she had come to live with Yu Yung-tse and that everything was over for her! Tongue-tied, she could only look at him, blushing and smiling.

"You want to know how things are with her? Well, there's a big stumbling-block in her path!" Realizing Tao-ching's embarrassment, Li-ping made a face and went on, smiling, "Tao-ching's a good girl, a good sweet girl, but that old pedant of hers is holding her back."

"Li-ping!" someone called. "Come here!" Before joining the others, she beamed at them both.

"Well, you must have a good talk if you're old friends!"

Left to themselves, Lu Chia-chuan and Tao-ching discovered that they had, indeed, a great deal to say.

Chapter 12

Tao-ching went back to her lonely lodgings before daybreak. Although tired and drowsy she could not sleep when she lay down. The sound of the New Year's Eve firecrackers disturbed her, and her heart was in a tumult after her experience that night. The strange yet friendly faces flashed before her mind's eye: Lu Chia-chuan, Lo Ta-fang, Hsu Ning, Hsiu-yu, Li-ping. . . . What delightful people they were — warm-hearted, eager to find a way out for China, and yearning to lead real, worthwhile lives. Thinking of the party and her conversation with Lu Chia-chuan, she gazed at the papered windows growing white in the dawn, and hugged herself with an involuntary smile. . . .

Firecrackers had been exploding merrily and the stove in Li-ping's room was aglow. Although it was already two in the morning, her young guests were still engrossed in conversation or immersed in different amusements. Hsu Ning and Hsiu-yu went into the courtyard to let off some firecrackers. Lo Ta-fang and Li-ping sat on the bed, talking in low voices. He seemed to be pleading with her and she started to cry, so that he too then appeared to be depressed. Finally he leaned back against the edge of the bed and Li-ping went off to join Hsu Ning and the others. It was said that Lo Ta-fang had been Li-ping's lover, but they seemed to have quarrelled, and both of them were moody now.

Tao-ching and Lu Chia-chuan had sat in one corner talking all this time, with the result that Tao-ching felt greatly drawn to this new friend, so sincere, clever, lively and warm-hearted. She was most impressed by his penetrating view on politics — she had never listened to anyone like him before. Seated by her side in a completely natural and friendly manner, he had inquired about her family, her background and experience, and asked her some surprising questions about her views and ideas. On her part, Tao-ching had flung her usual reserve to the winds and poured out her heart to him as to an old friend.

She was amazed at the way his questions and simple statements seemed to open her eyes and enable her to understand more fully the inner meaning of things. So she continued to talk with him without the least sign of fatigue.

"Brother Lu," — she had borrowed Hsu Ning's form of address — "can you tell me something about the Red Army and the Communist Party? Are they really for the people and for the country? Why do some people call them bandits?"

Lu Chia-chuan was sitting in the shadow. A mischievous twinkle appeared in his large sparkling eyes as he slowly turned to look at her.

"A thief is the most likely person to accuse others of theft; a moralist with three wives and four concubines is the one most likely to attack women for not remaining chaste. The rulers of China, who have slaughtered hundreds of thousands of young men, denounce others as cut-throats, incendiaries, robbers and bandits. . . . Is there anything surprising in that?"

Tao-ching smiled, appreciating his sense of humour, and beginning to feel bolder and more at ease.

"Brother Lu," she went on, "you said just now that we young people must resist and struggle in order to find a way out. But I can't quite believe it."

His eyes widened in surprise. "Why not? Do you think you can find a way out by keeping quiet and not complaining?"

Tao-ching hung her head, rumpled her white linen handkerchief nervously, and in a low, sad voice answered, "You don't know. . . . I have resisted and struggled, but I didn't find a way out."

Lu Chia-chuan brushed this aside with a laugh. There was something especially intimate and warm about his frank, open laughter.

"So that's it, eh? Well, Tao-ching, let me give you an example. . . ." He glanced round the roomful of cheerful young people who were busy drinking and talking, and sketched a character with one finger. "See, Tao-ching, it's like this. The character *mu** is only a single tree, but two of them make a wood like your name, and three or more form a huge forest that no storm or wind can destroy. When you struggle along on your own, in isolation, naturally you meet with nothing but knocks and rebuffs; but when you pitch into the collective struggle, when you link your own fate with that of the people, you stop being like a single, helpless tree and become part of the great forest."

Tao-ching couldn't help chuckling at that. "How well you put it! In the past, all I cared about was my own integrity — I seldom worried about anything else. Tonight after listening to all of you, I feel I've been . . . been. . . ."

"Been what?"

"Been a proper fool!" she said naively, a little surprised to find herself speaking so freely to a man whom she hardly knew.

"That's probably because you've stayed too long in your ivory tower," he rejoined casually with a smile. "Tao-ching, in stormy times like these, you must leave that small personal circle of yours and look at the wide, wide world. It's a tragic and yet beautiful world. You must get out and have a look around."

His talk had indescribable charm, for he combined a lively concern for others with a ready wit and the power to open men's eyes. . . . The more Tao-ching remembered of what had happened, the happier and more relaxed she felt.

"What an innocent you are, Tao-ching, and how honest!" he had remarked with obvious sincerity. "It's good that you want to find out so many things; but we can't talk of everything in one evening. In a day or two I'll drop in and bring you some books — I don't suppose you've read much on social science, have you? There is some available. There is also some good Soviet literature, and as you love novels, you should read *The Iron Flood*, and *The Nineteen*,* as well as Gorky's

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* *Mu* 木 means "wood" or "tree". *Lin* 林 means a "wood" or "forest". *Shen* 森 means "a large forest".

* By the Soviet writers Serafimovich and Fadeyev.

Mother".

This was the first time Tao-ching had been encouraged to read, and she gazed with gratitude at his handsome face.

They were deep in conversation when Li-ping came up and said:

"Old Lu, Tao-ching is a thoroughly honest, intelligent kid, but we must help her to get rid of that millstone round her neck. It's too bad to see a fresh flower on a heap of cow-dung. He'll be the ruin of her!"

Blushing scarlet, Tao-ching cast an imploring glance at Li-ping, for she had no wish to hear Yu Yung-tse mentioned at such a moment.

In the early hours of the morning, Tao-ching and Li-ping saw Lu Chia-chuan and Lo Ta-fang off. Li-ping talked with Lo Ta-fang in the cold street, with Tao-ching and Lu Chia-chuan following them, conversing as they walked.

"I feel so bad, Brother Lu, because I know absolutely nothing about the revolution or what we should do to save the country. Do bring me some books tomorrow!"

"I will. Goodbye for the present!" He gripped both girls by the hand warmly, Tao-ching feeling a strange reluctance to part.

"What clever, talented people they are! . . ." As she smiled at the thought, sparrows chirped outside her window to greet the dawn. Then she remembered Yung-tse, who had gone home alone to spend the New Year holidays with his parents. She had not accompanied him because she dreaded meeting Yu Ching-tang. She had been invited to Li-ping's New Year party because she was alone in their lodgings, but now the thought of Yung-tse weighed heavily on her mind.

"How unlucky I am compared with them!" And sighing, she pulled the quilt over her head.

Afer parting with the girls, Lu Chia-chuan and Lo Ta-fang walked along the deserted street together.

"Why were you so depressed today, Ta-fang? I suppose you have quarrelled with Li-ping." Lu Chia-chuan smiled shrewdly

at his friend and threw an arm round his broad shoulders as if to comfort him.

"That's it!" rejoined Lo Ta-fang excitedly. "What's come over that girl? Or was I mistaken all along? . . . Jilting me doesn't matter so much, but she shouldn't run after Hsu Ning like that. Hsiu-yu and Hsu Ning have been friends for years, they might have been made for each other; but she's quite shamelessly trying to break it up. Don't you agree, Old Lu, that once someone becomes politically backward he's bound to degenerate in his private life too? Li-ping used to be really keen. She had ideals, that girl, that's why I loved her. But now she's given up her studies and won't attend meetings of any kind either. Play-acting, becoming a movie star and love affairs are the only things that interest her. . . . Naturally someone of my type doesn't appeal to her any more."

Lu Chia-chuan nodded in silence. Glancing down the deserted street, he whispered, "Comrade, I'm sure you will get over it — after all, love isn't everything! . . ." He cast a significant look at Lo Ta-fang, a mischievous smile curving his lips again.

Lo Ta-fang gave him a punch and walked on, muttering:

"Right! I see what you mean, but it seems strange to me that a man who has so little to do with women should take such a keen interest in Lin Tao-ching. Why, you talked with her for several hours! Don't you know that she's got what Li-ping calls a 'millstone round her neck'? I know that lover of hers. He's a faithful disciple of Hu Shih. I tried to win him over, but it was no use."

"Don't talk rubbish!" Lu Chia-chuan retorted gravely. "I've already learned something about her from my brother-in-law. She's got a strong sense of justice and plenty of courage. We should lend her a helping hand instead of letting her sink deeper into the mud. At Peitaiho, she had a heated argument with my brother-in-law over the September the Eighteenth Incident, and she declared that China could never be enslaved. To be frank, I was very taken by her fine spirit and the serious tone in which she spoke. Why should you make it out to be something personal? . . . Better watch that tongue of yours! Stop talking rot!"

"It was a joke!" Lo Ta-fang chuckled. "Can't you take a joke? As if I don't know you! Devoted to our cause, you've never considered your own personal interest. You're a regular Puritan, although you're in the company of girls all day long. I wish I were the same! Li-ping — oh, well! Let's not mention her."

"I'm no Puritan," replied Lu Chia-chuan thoughtfully. "But under the circumstances I can't let personal considerations count. Ta-fang, that girl — Lin Tao-ching — is charming because of her pluck and her innocence. She's a rebel! It's our duty to help her and show her the right path. Don't you agree?"

Lo Ta-fang turned to him with a grin.

"Of course! We should show her the path of revolution!"

Although it was New Year's Eve, there were not many people about at this hour. Only a few passers-by came into sight from time to time in the dimly lighted streets. Before parting, the two friends spoke about their work. Since Lu Chia-chuan's return from Nanking after the big demonstration, it had been unsafe for him to remain in Peking University, and the Party had transferred him to do underground work among the students. He advised Lo Ta-fang:

"Do all you can and use your father's influence to stay on at the university. As the reactionaries bring more and more pressure to bear on us, it becomes impossible for most of us to carry on openly. So you and Hsu Hui should do your best to throw dust into the enemy's eyes, in order to strike hard when the chance comes. Oh, another thing — Li Meng-yu is now in the Tangshan mines working among the miners."

"You don't say!" Excited to hear this news, Lo Ta-fang stood still and looked eagerly at his friend. "Old Lu, I'd like to go there too. It's no joke working among intellectuals."

"Quiet now! Goodbye!" Seeing someone approaching in the distance, Lu Chia-chuan nudged Lo Ta-fang and they

separated. Then, swaggering like a drunkard, Lu Chia-chuan started chanting an aria from a Peking opera:

On the Moon Festival night
Brother Hsueh wrote a missive in the bright moonlight. . . .

He lurched along, singing, and disappeared into a narrow lane.

Yung-tse came back to Peiping before the beginning of the new term. His first impression on re-entering his rooms was that everything remained unchanged: bed, bookcase, flowers, curios and kitchen-ware. But Tao-ching had been transformed! She, who had been so silent and moody, now surprised him by sitting by the door, singing like any lively young girl. He was most astonished by her eyes which, although always beautiful, had usually lacked lustre and appeared sorrowful; now they were radiating joy, sparkling like an autumn lake in which happiness and enchantment seem to ripple.

"You can tell from a young woman's eyes if she is in love. . . ." Recalling this passage from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina,* Yung-tse was suddenly seized by a foreboding. He stole uneasy glances at Tao-ching and, as soon as she went out to shop, took the chance to rummage through trunks, drawers, the bookcase and even the waste-paper basket. He found nothing, however, except a few leftist books on the desk and by her pillow. Nervously rolling his eyes, he muttered to himself:

"I'm sure of it — someone's been making love to her."

Now that Yung-tse was back, Tao-ching cheerfully cooked for him, sat by him while he ate, and told him of her new friends, of her change in outlook, and of the happiness she had found. She would have thought it wrong to keep this from her lover. As Yung-tse listened he turned pale and, putting down his bowl, said with a frown:

"Tao-ching, I can hardly believe you've changed so quickly. . . ." After a moment's silence he continued, "I implore you not to go on like this — it's too dangerous. Once you're branded as a Red they can cut off your head!"

Tao-ching was very much annoyed. After all, she had done nothing but make some new friends and read a few progressive books. Why should he try to frighten her like this? She stared with contempt at his puzzled expression and, as soon as she could trust herself to speak, gave vent to the thoughts she had never before expressed:

"Yung-tse, what makes you so hyper-sensitive? You're also dissatisfied with the rotten old society and you know that the Japanese are trampling over China — why can't you go a step further and do something useful for the people and for the country?"

"Because. . . . I think . . ." he muttered. "I think this is beyond us, Tao-ching. This is up to the government and our armed forces. What can pale-faced scholars with bare hands accomplish? Of course, it's easy enough to shout empty slogans! As you know, I took part in the students' patriotic movement too, but that was some time ago. Now — now I think the best thing is to concentrate on studying. We have a home, we'd better keep out of harm's way. . . ."

"How can you be such a fool?" She cut him short vehemently. "You're the one shouting empty slogans! I never thought you would turn out to be such a coward!"

Yung-tse was thunderstruck, and for some minutes remained speechless, his beady eyes gazing at Tao-ching. Suddenly his face turned pale, his lips quivered, and he put his head on the table, sobbing convulsively, apparently even more distressed than she. It was not his pride that was wounded — he was suffering the pangs of jealousy!

". . . Cruel . . . how cruel she's become! She must have had a change of heart and fallen in love with someone else. . . ." Tears streamed from his eyes at the thought. In his view, love was the only thing in the world capable of changing a woman.

After this estrangement Tao-ching and Yung-tse were not on

speaking terms for several days, but she remained quite cheerful. Her dark eyebrows merrily arched, she would hum a tune while preparing the meals or washing. Housework finished, she would take a book and read avidly for hours, neither moving nor looking up. Absorption in her own studies seemed to make her oblivious of Yung-tse's existence and the dullness of life within these narrow walls. Her spirit soared out into the wide, wide world beyond. As for Yung-tse, he was in no mood to attend lectures. All day long he shut himself up in their small lodgings to keep a watch on Tao-ching and, though he tried to ferret out her secrets, he was bewildered to find her so frank and open. There was no sign of a new lover.

In the evening, Tao-ching would bend over her desk, quietly studying Lenin's *The State and Revolution,* taking notes and underlining important passages. When she grew tired, she would read Gorky's *Mother.* The boundless ardour that this book aroused in her, with its vision of a happier world, filled her with a joy and contentment she had never known. On the other hand, Yung-tse was bored to distraction in the little room, and had recourse to the Chinese classics which he had been studying for more than a year. Sitting by Tao-ching, he would read aloud his favourite passages. His little desk was littered with paper-backed, thread-bound volumes of this kind, and he would read on and on until he became completely absorbed in the distant past, immersed in old scenes and rare editions. When he needed a short rest, he would start building castles in the air — tell himself that he would "found a school", become a great scholar and a well-known figure, and be able to live in style. Ambitions like these would spur him on to bury himself yet more deeply in his books.

Tao-ching's eagerness to read, however, was inspired by a revolutionary enthusiasm. Regardless of whether or not she could assimilate all the Marxist classics, and not knowing how to combine theory with practice, she read on in the hope that from these books she might catch a glimpse of the new world and the truth she had long been seeking. Thus the two young people — one looking forward to what was new, the other looking backward to what was old — would sit reading the books of their choice till late at night. Since New Year's Day, when Lu Chia-chuan brought Tao-ching this new reading material, her outlook on life had undergone a transformation. The effect on her feelings was no less dramatic. Many years afterwards, she clearly remembered that the first book Lu Chia-chuan recommended to her was one entitled *How to Study the New Social Sciences.* She could recall how, late on New Year's night, she lay curled up in her quilt reading, regardless of the fact that the stove had gone out and a piercing wind was whistling through the cracks of the walls. Entranced, she read on and on throughout the night, until the slender volume was finished.

Lu Chia-chuan only gave her four standard Marxist-Leninist works on social science, yet it took Tao-ching five days of concentrated study to finish them. Little did she realize what a far-reaching effect these five days would have on her life. These books showed her the trends of development of human society and its future; they revealed the light of truth and the road she should take; from them she understood what lay behind the lines written by Tu Fu*:

Behind those scarlet gates meat and wine go to waste,
While out on the road lie the bones of men frozen to death.

These books also told her what had caused her mother's death, banishing the pessimism and despair that had so often assailed her. They filled her heart with an irresistible revolutionary ardour that impelled her ever onwards.

She hoped that Lu Chia-chuan would come and bring her more books now that she had finished the ones at hand, but he failed to appear. She borrowed other books on politics, economics and philosophy from Pai Li-ping and Hsu Ning, as well as some works of literature. Many of them she could not understand. For instance, she could make nothing of Engels'

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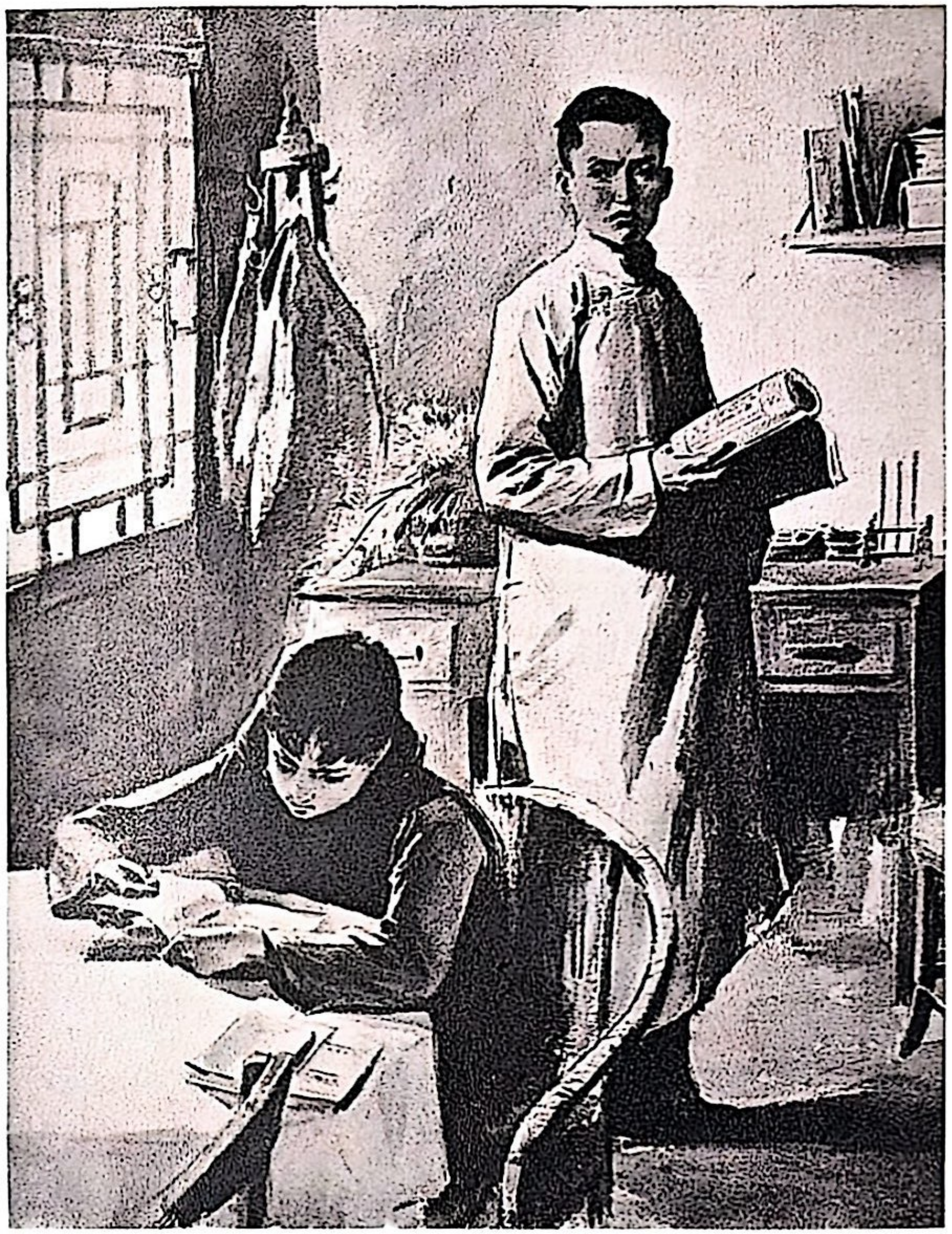
* 712-770, great realist poet of the Tang Dynasty.



Anti-Dühring and Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Yet her youthful craving for knowledge, her aspiring spirit, made her read on eagerly whether she understood or not. Yung-tse was away at the time and she alone, so she would devote fifteen or sixteen hours a day to reading — even reading during meals. As her money ran short, all she could afford to eat was steamed bread made of coarse corn-flour. She grudged the time to prepare dishes. The corn bread was not very palatable; but she was so absorbed in her books that she often finished her meal without noticing it. After discovering the new "relish" of her books she was rarely parted from them.

"Hsu Ning, do tell me: Are metaphysics and formal logic the same?"

"If the three principles of dialectics can be applied to every situation, what is the meaning of the negation of negation?"

"Why hasn't the Soviet Union started a communist society yet? What will China be like under communism?"

". . . ."

These were some of the questions to which she sought an answer.

As Hsu Ning often called on Pai Li-ping, he took to dropping in on Tao-ching, and each time she asked him to explain problems which were puzzling her. He was frequently forced to shake his head and parry with a smile:

"Steady on, miss! Don't you think you're biting off more than you can chew? How can anyone absorb so much in such a short time? I'm afraid it's beyond me to answer all your questions." Yet when it actually came to discussing theory, Hsu Ning gave her eager and systematic explanations which she could understand. Tao-ching was extraordinarily pleased and proud to have made such new friends as these. She regained the youth which had seemed to be slipping away, often sang or hummed for sheer happiness, and filled each day to the full, as if possessed of an over-abundance of energy. Such happiness was beyond Yung-tse's comprehension. He grew suspicious and suffered the agonies of jealousy.

Chapter 13

Tao-ching was lighting the stove in the courtyard to prepare the midday meal when, raising her head, she saw Lu Chia-chuan enter. She immediately put down the coal-balls and hurried to usher him into their room, ignoring the fact that the firewood was already burning in the stove.

"What's the hurry? Why don't you put in the coal-balls first? The wood will quickly burn itself out," said Lu Chia-chuan, standing smilingly beside the stove, as he put the coal-balls on the fire. Thick black smoke curled up from the small stove, and Tao-ching was rather flustered at being caught doing such trivial housework. Lu Chia-chuan's deft help increased her embarrassment.

"Brother Lu, I haven't seen you for so long," she said in a reproachful tone. "Come in! How have you been? You can't have known how eagerly I was waiting. . . ." She stood there quite incoherent in her excitement. Lu Chia-chuan calmly shook hands with her, and then moved a chair near to the door for himself. Smiling at her he said:

"Well, how have you been getting on, Tao-ching? I've been rather busy — that's why I didn't call."

Tao-ching did her best to calm down, but an uprush of respect and indefinable pleasure at this meeting made her eyes sparkle. Leaning against the table, still feeling shy and awkward, she softly said:

"Brother Lu, I've been reading a good deal and learned a lot. It's changed me. . . ." She flushed, not knowing how to express herself. After a moment, seeing that her confusion and excitement had passed unnoticed, she quieted down enough to tell him of the books she had read, of the effect they had on her, and of the changes in her own feelings. Her spirits rose as she talked, until finally all trace of nervousness vanished. Then her head tilted to one side, her face aglow, she confided: "Isn't it strange, Brother Lu! In this short time I've become quite a different person — I feel much younger now!"

"You weren't old to begin with, how can you feel younger?" He surveyed her through half-closed eyes, a teasing smile playing around his lips.

"I assure you it's true." Tao-ching was completely in earnest. "You don't know, Brother Lu, but though I'm only twenty, my . . . my past life made me feel like an old woman. Everything in life seemed meaningless and hopeless. I was in such despair that I'd even thought of doing away with myself. . . . But since New Year's Eve, when I met all of you and you encouraged me to read those books, there's been a sudden change. . . ."

She turned round to find Yung-tse in the middle of the room, his beady eyes fixed reproachfully on Lu Chia-chuan. She stopped abruptly. Before she could speak again, Yung-tse turned to her with a frown:

"The stove is blazing away. Why don't you see to your cooking? Can high-sounding talk fill our stomachs?" And without waiting for a reply, he strode out of the room and banged the door behind him.

Tao-ching felt like a plant blighted by a sudden frost. She flushed and, for quite a while, could not speak because of anger. Lu Chia-chuan was more experienced, and able to cope with a delicate situation. He looked at the door which had slammed, and then quietly glanced at Tao-ching's pained face. Standing up and walking over to her he said:

"I've met Brother Yu before. . . . Since he's in a hurry to eat, you'd better get his meal for him at once. We mustn't let our conversation inconvenience him. Why not bring the stove inside, so that we can talk as you prepare the meal?"

"All right!" Tao-ching gladly agreed. She had been afraid that Lu Chia-chuan would take offence and go away. Now that he was staying, she was happy and she immediately brought in the stove and put on the rice. Her indignation gradually gave way to depression. With lowered head, she said, "Brother Lu, you must find a way out for me. I'm so cut off from things, I can scarcely breathe! . . ."

Then she looked up, her eyes very bright. "Will you recommend me to join the Red Army, or the Communist Party?

I feel ready to join the revolution, or the Northeastern Anti-Japanese Volunteers."

He gave an exclamation of astonishment. This girl thought it was very simple to join the revolution! Looking at her reflectively, he asked, "Why? Why do you want to join the Red Army?"

" 'Better be a broken piece of jade than a whole tile!' as the saying goes. I don't want to waste my life in a humdrum, meaningless way. Ever since I was a child, I've been determined to live to some purpose. If this wicked society won't let me live happily, I prefer to die!" Her cheeks grew rosy and her black eyes sparkled as she continued, "But after reading the revolutionary books you lent me I began to know the truth and made up my mind to devote my life to the cause of truth. I believe that to make life worthwhile we must live like the heroes who go to their death as if they were going home. Brother Lu, do let me plunge into the thick of the battle! I can't go on living like this!"

Lu Chia-chuan sat there tapping the table as if to punctuate this flow of words. Then he shook his head, and a faintly quizzical look appeared in his lively eyes again.

"Tao-ching, let's first discuss this problem. By the way, if you don't stir the rice it will stick to the bottom of the pan. In the past you had some clashes with your family; you became dissatisfied with this dark society; now you are in a hurry to join the revolution and fight on the battlefield. What, after all, is your purpose?"

Tao-ching was puzzled and did not know what to answer. She bit her lips thoughtfully, forgot the rice, and a smell of burning filled the room. She was so lost in thought that she did not even notice when Lu Chia-chuan stirred the rice and moved it to one side of the stove to simmer slowly. After a few moments, looking at him in some bewilderment, she said hesitantly:

"I've not thought it over very carefully. . . . But I don't believe that I want to join the Red Army for selfish reasons.

I hate self-centred people who think of nothing but their own personal interests."

"Are you sure your thoughts and wishes aren't determined by personal considerations?" he asked.

She sprang to her feet. "Do you mean that I'm an individualist?"

"No, I don't mean that," he answered gravely. "I have this question to ask you: Why did you wander east and west, snapping your fingers at this and turning up your nose at that? What made you feel miserable and depressed? For whom were you sorry? For the toiling masses or for yourself? Now you want to join the Red Army and the Communist Party and become a heroine. . . . What is your motive? To deliver the people from their sufferings, or to gratify your own ambition — to live a heroic life and escape from your present humdrum surroundings?"

Tao-ching felt dazed. After a slight hesitation she could not help smiling again as she realized how well Lu Chia-chuan understood her deepest secrets! Feeling rather ashamed and turning slightly away, she faltered:

"Brother Lu, you're quite right. All I wanted in the past was to be a good person — not to take advantage of others nor to let them take advantage of me. I suppose I was thinking only of myself; it's true that I didn't often think about others, but still I don't altogether understand. I often saved my pocket-money to give to ricksha-men and beggars. I like helping the poor. Can you say that I was doing this for myself too?"

Lu Chia-chuan nodded and said:

"I think that to assess anyone's behaviour — including all his efforts and struggles — we have to look not only at his motives but also at the effect of his actions. Does he help society to move forward, or does he just glorify its rottenness and help to preserve it?" A kindly, significant smile flashed from his eyes. He glanced alertly out of the door and then back at the neglected rice pan. "You may have helped a few ricksha-men and beggars, Tao-ching," he continued. "But can you provide food for thousands of ricksha-men and beggars? Apart from gratifying your personal desire to be 'good', what use is your charity to society as a whole and to the toiling masses? As for joining the Red Army and going to the battlefield, your intentions are good; but you must be realistic. After all, there are different kinds of revolutionary work. There is fierce fighting against the enemy and there is also a struggle in daily life, which appears so commonplace that people hardly notice it." Stopping to stir the rice which was burning again, he shot Tao-ching another glance. "Take, for instance, the household chores like cooking and washing which you are now doing. They are trivial and may seem of no account, but suppose we are doing this for the people and for the revolution, suppose it is something that must be done and the task is required of us, then we should do it. Joining the revolution does not necessarily mean fighting on the battlefield. . . . What do you say to that, Tao-ching? Do you still insist on dying like a hero at the front?"

He smiled, and Tao-ching smiled too. Like a little skiff drifting on the waves, her spirits had risen and fallen with all he said. When she saw that he was giving her sincere, candid and friendly advice, she quickly recovered from the blow to her self-esteem. His cheerful laughter and warm concern for her made her heart glow.

"Brother Lu, I'm most grateful to you!" she said as a smile irradiated her flushed cheeks and her lovely eyes sparkled.

"What! Isn't lunch ready yet? It's noon." Yung-tse had slipped into the room. Flinging his hat on the bed, he seated himself stiffly and glared at Tao-ching.

She suddenly turned pale and stared at him in bewilderment, unable to utter a word. She did not want to quarrel with him in front of Lu Chia-chuan.

Lu Chia-chuan was tactful, and sensing the tension in the atmosphere picked up his hat, nodded to Yung-tse with a smile, and with the same quiet smile said to Tao-ching:

"Well, we've had a good talk today. Now it's time for you to have lunch, I must be going." With a final nod to Yung-tse he went out. Tao-ching followed him in silence to the gate,

then came back biting her lips. Turning round, she found Yung-tse behind her, looking very gloomy and cross.

Tao-ching went to bed supperless that night, confused by thoughts and feelings which she found hard to define. She was unable to sleep, and when she looked at Yung-tse she saw that his head was lowered and he was meditating about something. Tears started to her eyes.

"Can this be the man I loved so dearly and gave my heart to? . . ." She pulled the quilt over her head to muffle the sound of her sobs.

Yung-tse continued to sit deep in thought. He had known for some time that Tao-ching was friendly with Lu Chia-chuan, and the frank, familiar tone of their talk today had made him realize more clearly why she had changed. He did his best to restrain his anger, thinking it beneath a man's dignity to let himself be hurt by a woman. Yet when he recalled Lu's handsome, alert figure and his unconventional manner, and the brilliance in Tao-ching's passionate eyes as she gazed at him, he was tormented by sorrow, anger and hate. Restless, he racked his brains for a long while, but could not decide what to do. Tao-ching was headstrong and stubborn, and she would go her own way. He could neither appeal to her reason nor move her by his tears; still less could he make her submit by a show of force. . . . What was the solution, then? At last he hit upon what he considered a brilliant scheme. He would write to Lu Chia-chuan, and warn him if he had any moral scruples at all to be careful.

This missive read as follows:

March 1933

Dear Mr. Lu,

In view of the fact that you and I are fellow students of Peking University, that your family and mine both hail from one village, and that you and I bear each other no personal grudge, I find it incomprehensible that you should, under pretext of propagating certain theories, poison my wife's mind to such an extent that she will act according to your bidding. Now that she is talking of "revolution" and "struggle" all day long, our domestic happiness has been undermined in the most unwarranted manner. How deplorable that you should take pleasure in my distress and build your fortune on my misery, though you may now find you have your heart's desire. . . . Everyone should have some moral scruples, and not ruin the happiness of others by means of stirring words and flowery speeches. To act contrariwise is against conscience and morality. I venture to offer you these words of advice and trust you will reflect well before drawing any conclusion as to whether I am in the right or in the wrong.

I beg to remain, dear sir,

Very respectfully yours,

Yu Yung-tse

After writing this he felt a little better, having given vent to his indignation. He sealed the letter, stretched himself, yawned and went over to the bed. Tao-ching was fast asleep. Her pale oval face was like pure sculptured marble, serene and gentle, framed in soft, short black hair. She was the soul of grace and beauty. A tiny smile lurked at the corners of her mouth, although tears still sparkled on her cheeks. "Why, she has been crying!" he thought. At once his anger and vexation vanished, to be replaced by something akin to pity. He suddenly understood that she was no ordinary girl but one with high ideals, and that he should understand her and forgive her. . . . He stood there watching her for a moment as he thought: "She is too good and honest to be unfaithful to me or love anybody else. Why should I alarm myself needlessly?. . ." His heart grew lighter, as if all his doubts had vanished. He stooped to give Tao-ching a gentle kiss on the cheek, and then braced himself to throw the letter into the dying embers of the stove. When a tongue of flame curled up to consume it, he felt as if he had performed a great feat. Raising his arms, he hit out several times like a boxer. Then, with another yawn, he quickly pulled off his clothes and climbed into bed.

Chapter 14

One day Hsu Ning called on Pai Li-ping. Finding she was not at home he dropped in to see Tao-ching. While still in the outer room, he asked:

"Where's Li-ping? Why is she out again?"

"How should I know?" Tao-ching smiled. "She's not the stay-at-home type." She saw disappointment clouding his handsome face.

Hsu Ning had been on very good terms with Tsui Hsiu-yu; but after she left for the Northeast he had fallen under the spell of Li-ping's charm, and recently the two had been seeing a great deal of each other. As Li-ping was sociable and had many friends there were, however, times when Hsu Ning could not find her. On such occasions he would come to Tao-ching for news of Li-ping.

Disconcerted, he sat down and demanded, "Tell me, Tao-ching, what's really the matter with Li-ping?"

She countered his question with another: "Have you heard from Hsiu-yu? Has she really joined the Volunteers to fight the Japanese?"

At these words, Hsu Ning flushed, and this gay, lively lad, in whose company there was always laughter and merriment, suddenly became crest-fallen and tongue-tied. He stared for some time at a portrait of Beethoven on the wall. Then turning his head involuntarily he smiled bitterly.

"Tao-ching, I don't want you to misunderstand. My love for Hsiu-yu has nothing in common with my feeling for Li-ping. I'd have gone to the Northeast with Hsiu-yu to join the Volunteers but for my mother's sake, and the fact that I'm going to graduate very soon. . . . I know Li-ping's type. . . ."

"So long as you know," said Tao-ching, who was incapable of speaking sharply, although she disapproved of the young man's attitude towards love. "Hsu Ning," she urged candidly, "don't forget Hsiu-yu! She's one of the best."

"You're right, Tao-ching. To tell you the truth, she's always in my mind, and the thought of her upsets me. . . ." Touched by Tao-ching's sincerity and friendly concern, Hsu Ning began to pour out his heart to her. "You see, at first I wasn't very much interested in Li-ping. But . . . but she has a way with her. . . . The trouble is, our work throws us together so much, and. . . . Well, let's drop the subject. I'm sure I can get the better of my feelings." After reflecting in silence for a moment, he stood up to go.

"Hsu Ning!" Tao-ching stopped him short. "Do tell me if you've seen Old Lu and Old Lo. What's happening? . . ."

"Oh, thanks for reminding me. Old Lu asked me to tell you that tomorrow is the anniversary of the March the Eighteenth Incident. A big memorial service will be held by the students of Peiping, and will probably be followed by a demonstration. Would you like to join in?"

"What's the demonstration for?"

"To oppose the Kuomintang's policy of non-resistance, Japan's further acts of aggression against China, and foreign imperialism as well as its flunkeys. Also to support the socialist Soviet Union."

"I'll join!" said Tao-ching without the least hesitation. "Are you going too? What about Old Lu?"

"He'll be there, of course!" All Hsu Ning's gloom had gone. He shook his fist at her and made a face. "And of course I shall be there too. Furthermore, Tao-ching, you must do all you can to persuade your friends to join. Old Lu wants us to arouse the masses. I must be going now. See you tomorrow. We're meeting in the Peking University grounds at eight. Mind you turn up!"

Tao-ching, standing alone at the threshold, watched Hsu Ning till he was some distance away. She was smiling. She had never taken part in a mass meeting or parade. What would it be like, she wondered? A strange excitement gripped her, and it took her a long time to calm down.

When Yung-tse trudged home with some books under his arm, Tao-ching went up to him and said coaxingly, "Yung-tse, I'm going to join the March the Eighteenth demonstration tomorrow. Do come with me!"

"What? What are you going to do?" He stared into her face in alarm.

"Join the March the Eighteenth parade. Why, don't you approve?"

Yung-tse put his books down in a listless manner, and some time passed before he could bring himself to speak. He spoke in a dismal, gloomy tone.

"Don't go, Tao-ching! Listen to me this once. I've heard many arrests are being made. . . . Saving the country is all very well, but why make a fuss over March the Eighteenth, which isn't worth commemorating? If anything happens. . . . Tao-ching, do be reasonable! A storm may blow up at any moment, and who knows where the lightning will strike. . . ." There was an imploring look in his intent eyes and anxiety was written on his face.

"No! We're not all cowards like you, afraid a falling leaf may crush you to death!" Tao-ching was usually patient when Yung-tse lectured and nagged, but when it came to the question of the revolution she easily flared up and would brook no interference. "Forget it," she said. "I wanted you to go with me, but now I see you don't even want me to go. Well, let's say no more, but each mind his own business." With that she ran out of the house.

Eager to persuade more people to join the parade, as Lu Chia-chuan had urged, she went to see her friend Wang Hsiao-yen.

"What is the demonstration for?" asked Hsiao-yen.

"To oppose Japanese imperialist aggression, to oppose the Kuomintang's policy of non-resistance, to oppose foreign imperialism and its flunkeys, and to support the socialist Soviet Union. . . ."

Hsiao-yen remained silent for some minutes, while Tao-ching stood watching her nervously, waiting for her verdict. Finally, shaking her head, she said earnestly:

"Don't take offence, Tao-ching, if I don't come along. Daddy says young people should study more problems and talk less politics. You haven't joined the parade yet, but you're talking politics all the time. . . . I don't understand what you're talking about, really I don't."

Tao-ching frowned, slightly flushed with annoyance and disappointment. "Hsiao-yen, you're quoting Hu Shih. When did you become a disciple of his?"

Hsiao-yen's eyes opened wide and in them shone a naive self-confidence. "Don't ask me that, Tao-ching," she said rather shyly. "Daddy's a genuine scholar and I trust him. . . . Don't let yourself be taken in by the arguments of the Left. Studying is more important than anything else. Whether it's a socialist country or not, what has the Soviet Union to do with us?"

Hsiao-yen had a good heart and her gentle disapproval, based on disbelief, was quite different from Yung-tse's selfish cowardice. So Tao-ching simply felt keenly disappointed with her friend, but had none of the resentment which Yung-tse had aroused. She also thought it was all right to show temper to a lover, but wrong to pull a long face at a friend.

The two girls gazed at each other in silence for a moment, then Tao-ching went home baffled.

That night, in bed, Yung-tse talked to her in a low, affectionate voice about the lives and loves of the world's great artists and writers — how they had delighted in the beauty of nature and sacrificed everything to love. Stroking her hair, he whispered tenderly:

"Tao-ching, do you still remember those days on the beach at Peitaiho? Remember that night when we sat there listening to the lapping of the waves? The sea was sparkling in the silver moonlight. I gazed into your eyes — eyes as deep, as bright, as beautiful as the sea! Your beauty so intoxicated me that I longed to take you in my arms and kiss you. I'll never forget that night, or the time we had together in Peitaiho. If only we could spend all our lives in such beautiful, poetic surroundings!" Immersed in memories, he closed his eyes, to open them presently with a look of pain. "But when you are brought face to face with reality — the tedium, the tension, the futile struggle over selfish interests and the smell of gun-powder everywhere — how can you help feeling deep bitterness of spirit? . . ." With eyes shut, he sighed and slipped his arms round her neck.

Yung-tse's words had given Tao-ching a vision of the vast, magnificent ocean, rippling silver in the moonlight. Grasping his hands, she gazed at him lovingly and murmured, "Yes, how beautiful it was!" But his final lament over the hardships and dangers of actual life put her on her guard, and gently withdrawing her hands she whispered, "Yung-tse, don't make things more difficult for me, please. Surely you can understand me. . . . Of course, I'll never forget Peitaiho, where we first met." Her heart was like a tangled skein, for she looked hopefully to the future yet could not forget the past. In her inmost heart, the past and the future were utterly opposed, and yet they were bound together.

"Darling!" Yung-tse caressed her hair. "I haven't the least objection to your standing up for the right. I know we must make our life more meaningful, but you are too young and inexperienced to cope with the pitfalls and snares of this evil society. That's what worries me. If we hadn't met at Peitaiho, Heaven knows what trouble you'd be in by this time! Don't you realize that in Peking University alone, there are so-called Trotskyites, nationalists and anarchists, not to mention different groups of the Kuomintang? There are very few genuine Communists, on whom you seem to pin your faith. I hear their number has dwindled almost to nothing since the purge. Where is the revolution in the real sense of the word? Are the people you are so close to reliable? Are you sure they mean what they say? Tao-ching, I'm not the die-hard you imagine. You just don't understand me if you think me selfish and conservative. . . . It makes me so unhappy!" He broke off to heave a deep, sad sigh.

The chill of early spring had penetrated their small room, for the night was cold. A fierce sandstorm, common in the north, was making the papered windows rustle. Tao-ching, nestling her head against Yung-tse's thin shoulder, was shivering.

"Are you sure they mean what they say? Could that be true of Lu Chia-chuan, Lo Ta-fang and Hsu Ning? No, impossible!" She tried to brush aside the suspicions implanted by Yung-tse. "I won't believe him! I won't!" protested her heart, as conflicting emotions brought tears to her eyes.

She quickly pulled herself together, saying firmly: "No, Yung-tse, don't try to destroy my faith. You've been cruel enough — but I trust them and I mean to go on trusting them. If I'm wrong, I'm willing to take the consequences. If some day I'm hurt or die as a result, I won't hold anyone but myself to blame."

"I won't allow it!" Yung-tse sat up abruptly. The despair in his beady eyes made him look like a wild beast at bay. "You are mine! Your life and mine are joined together. We shall live and die together — no force on earth can part us! No, nothing can part us! I won't let you rush about like a blind man riding a blind horse, Tao-ching. On no account must you join that parade tomorrow! Understand? This is the first time I've interfered with your actions, but this is my duty."

"Your duty! How dare you!" cried Tao-ching, who had also sat up abruptly. "Now I understand what was behind this bed-time lecture! What right have you to meddle in my affairs? Am I going to commit arson, robbery or adultery? You took me in for a while with that fine talk, but now I see what you were leading up to — you wanted to make me change my mind and lead me astray . . . oh, you'll be the ruin of me!"

They quarrelled so vehemently that their neighbours were aroused, and only when someone coughed loudly, by way of protest, did they gradually calm down.

Tao-ching lay awake all night and as day began to dawn she crept out of bed, and glanced at Yung-tse who was sleeping soundly. Without stopping to wash, she tiptoed out of the house, afraid he would keep her by force if he awoke. It would be dangerous if all the neighbours knew where she was going!

She went to Hsiao-yen's room in the girls' hostel of Peking University and had a wash there. Then, unable to persuade her friend to join the parade, she walked alone to the back of the Red Building.

Chapter 15

It was a fine spring morning. Perky sparrows were whirring from one green branch to another, and the soft, fresh-scented breeze brought the conviction that spring had really come at last. The playing-field behind the Red Building of Peking University was bathed in morning sunshine as the students gathered there in twos and threes. After the September the Eighteenth Incident, the patriotic movement to resist Japan which had been spreading like wildfire throughout the country had been checked by the bloody massacres carried out by the Kuomintang. As it became impossible for the students to stage large-scale demonstrations, they began to hold small-scale meetings which were ostensibly non-political, as well as parades and demonstrations which could be assembled and dispersed rapidly.

More and more young men and women were gathering on the big sports ground. By the low university wall stood a row of weeping willows, their tender green leaves swaying in the breeze. Lo Ta-fang was pacing backwards and forwards beneath them, his broad shoulders now in strong relief against the morning sun, now advancing boldly towards it. From time to time his thick black eyebrows contracted in thought, but when he raised his head to look at the swiftly growing, tumultuous crowd, his face lit up with boyish delight.

He had met Pai Li-ping the night before. She had clasped his hands teasingly and scolded with a smile:

"A fine fellow you are! Ignoring me all this time! Have you forgotten the past? . . . I'm still true to you!"

He shook his head, restrained his agitation, and broached a different topic. "Tomorrow is the anniversary of March the Eighteenth, Li-ping," he said. "You must go and take part. How are you getting on? Are you as busy as ever?"

She smiled, arching pencilled brows, her fascinating eyes wide open.

"My dear friend, I'm frantically busy, what with performances and rehearsals — you know I'm playing the heroine in *Lady Windermere's Fan*? . . . You probably aren't aware that I'm leaving for Shanghai soon, to start acting in films. I've simply no time to attend to anything else. You must go to this March the Eighteenth meeting for me, my dear! . . ." She grasped his hands firmly again, an enchanting smile on her face.

"A film star!" He shook his head and with a bitter smile turned and left her.

Lo Ta-fang threw his arms round the willow's gnarled trunk and spat in disgust. Then he looked at the seething crowd and soon a song reached his ears:

We must fight our way home!
We must fight our way home!
Drive out the Japanese imperialists! . . .

The stirring music warmed his heart and, shaking his fist, he muttered:

"Old Lu might as well send me to an old folk's home!"

The fact was that Lu Chia-chuan, now leading the Party work in Peking University, had time and again told Lo Ta-fang not to expose himself unnecessarily but, in this critical period of White terror, to work underground as far as possible in order to conserve their strength. Furthermore, he had forbidden Lo Ta-fang to make a speech at this meeting and had decided to speak himself. It would be easier for him to go into hiding if the need arose, because he was no longer in the university and had no fixed address. Lo Ta-fang felt frustrated and depressed because he was not allowed to speak. His powerful body housed a vast store of energy and a passion to destroy and root out all abuses; yet these qualities were being denied outlet.

The crowd on the playing-field reminded him of the time when tens of thousands of students had gone south to stage a demonstration, fighting their way into the Kuomintang's main headquarters in Nanking, smashing the offices of the *Central Daily* and storming the garrison headquarters. That had been an epic battle. Unconsciously he drew a deep breath at the thought of it.

"Party discipline!" he muttered. "Instructions are given for a purpose. They must be obeyed." After some reflection, he strode into the crowd.

Tao-ching had now also reached the sports ground, but she searched in vain for Hsu Ning, Lu Chia-chuan and Lo Ta-fang among the crowd. Not knowing anyone there, she stood apart, excited but rather scared. Soon there were between three and four hundred people assembled there, but she was still standing on the fringe of the crowd alone. All at once slogans burst forth from different sides, loud and strong, sending a thrill of joy through her.

"Oppose the attack of Japanese imperialism!"

"Down with the Kuomintang traitors who are selling the country!"

"Set up a people's government!"

"Remember March the Eighteenth and unite to act! Down with Japanese imperialism!"

These brave, defiant cries stirred the hearts of all. Standing at a little distance from the main, somewhat irregular, ranks, Tao-ching longed to raise her fist and shout with the others, but she was too distracted to open her mouth. As she began to wipe her perspiring forehead with a white handkerchief, she noticed a girl dressed in a shabby blue-lined cotton gown standing beside her; she was dark complexioned, short and rather thin. This bobbed-haired student seemed quite composed and was shouting clearly and strongly, evidently giving the others a lead. "How brave she is!" thought Tao-ching, staring admiringly. The other girl saw her embarrassment and nodded to her in greeting.

"Is this your first meeting of this kind? Are you alone?"

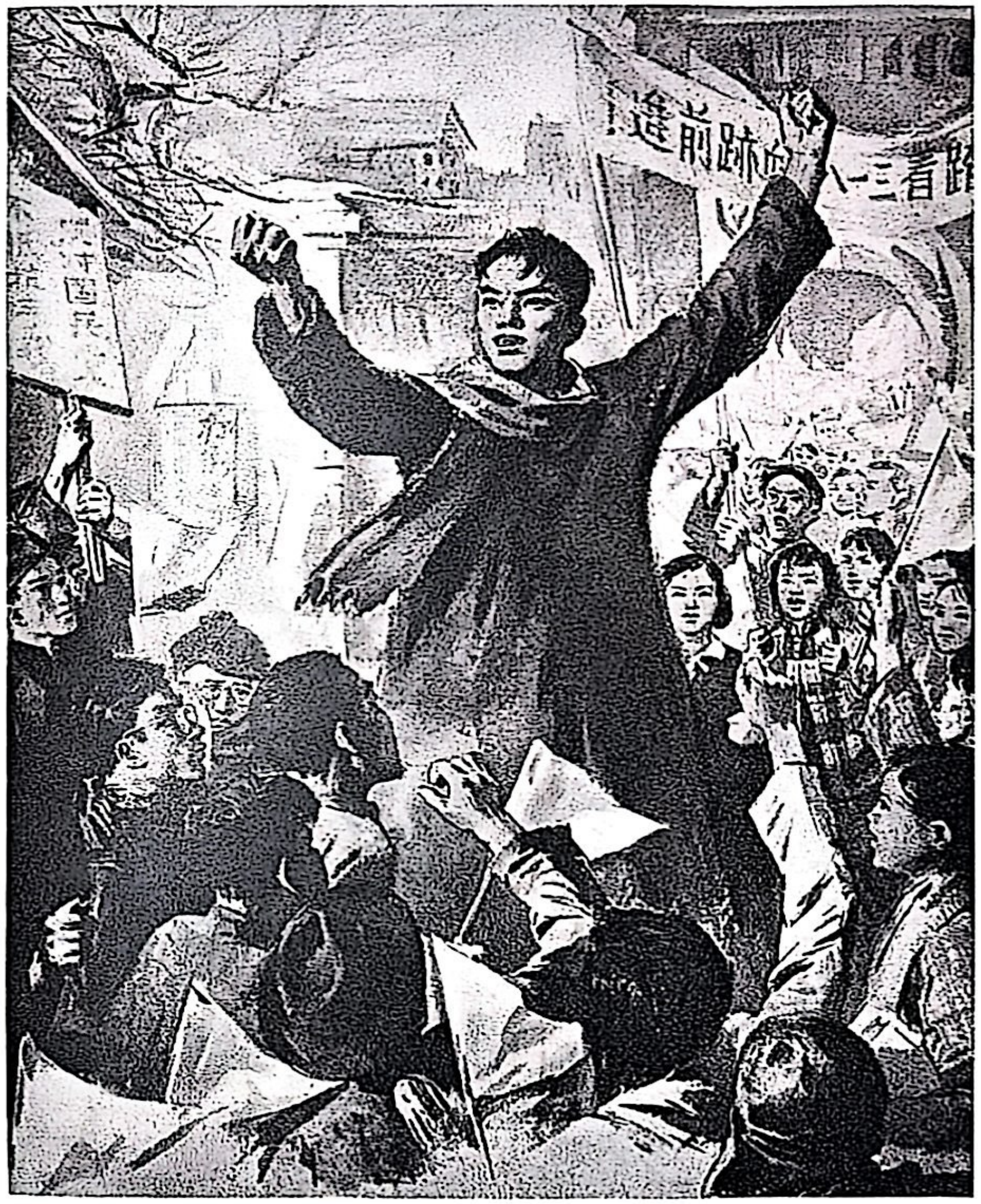
Overjoyed to have the ice broken, Tao-ching drew nearer and answered, "Yes, I came here alone and haven't found anyone I know yet. . . . To which school do you belong?"

"Peking University." The girl took Tao-ching's hand in a friendly, natural manner. "The first time I joined a parade like this, I too was scared. I stopped being afraid when I started shouting slogans with the others. Come on, do join us!"

Many pairs of young, eager eyes fell on Tao-ching, and the warm, friendly glances seemed to be inviting her to join their ranks and become one with them. She gained courage at once and, hand in hand with the girl, she ran forward to a platform on which some stools had been set up. There a short young man wearing spectacles was making an impassioned speech, accompanied by many gestures.

"Fellow students! Comrades! The Kuomintang is on the verge of collapse! The high tide of the revolution is coming! We must arm ourselves to defeat Japanese imperialism! Down with the Kuomintang! Support the Chinese Communist Party! Support the Soviet Union! Support the Chinese Soviet Government!. . ." While he was shouting these slogans, red and green leaflets began to flutter through the air. Tao-ching's clear, ardent voice mingled with the strong resolute shouts of the crowd to float in the spring air above the ancient city. As she followed the lead of the girl from Peking University, her bright eyes shone and her heart beat fast with excitement. For the first time in her life, she felt the tremendous power of the masses and, no longer alone or afraid, she was now a part of this vast gathering.

As these thoughts darted through her mind, police whistles were heard. The speaker who had been shouting slogans faltered and jumped down from the platform. At once someone in a black cotton-padded gown calmly leaped up to take his



place. Tao-ching stared — surely that was Lu Chia-chuan? Hastily jogging her companion's arm, she whispered:

"Look! My friend — he's my teacher too — is going to speak!"

"Old Lu, you mean?" Apparently the other knew him, for she pressed Tao-ching's hand in reply.

Lu Chia-chuan climbed on to a stool. The warm spring breeze ruffled his short trim hair. He faced the audience with glowing, magnetic eyes, and as the shrilling of the police whistles drew nearer he began to speak in a low, compelling voice:

"Fellow students! Comrades! Open your eyes to see reality — to see the bloodshed and murder!"

This arresting opening held his listeners spellbound. All conversation died away. With bated breath, the crowd of several hundred raised their heads to look at his imperturbable, expressive features. "All of us who are young have high aspirations and long for our country to become rich and strong, so that we can have a great and brilliant future. . . . It was for this that the revolutionaries of old, one after another, laid down their lives! For this, the heroes of the March the Eighteenth Incident gave their lives! Now we are working hard, applying ourselves to our studies in good earnest; we are sparing no effort to build up a good society in China. How different from our rulers, who are leading a life of shameless dissipation! They bow and scrape like slaves to the foreigners, willing to sell the country for their own selfish ends; at home they lord it over the people by means of imprisonment, enslavement, arrests and massacres. . . . Since the Kuomintang came into power, our fellow countrymen have been reduced to appalling misery, while hundreds of thousands of young men and women have been massacred or murdered. Hundreds of thousands! If these murdered could line up here, there would be no room for them, not even if our university grounds were many times larger. In dealing with their own compatriots, the Kuomintang have proved themselves both 'brave' and brutal; but let's see how they stand up to foreign powers. Now the Japanese aggressors are attacking the passes of Lengkou, Hsifeng and Kupei. The garrison troops there, their patriotism thoroughly aroused, have of their own accord taken up arms to resist the Japanese invaders. They are at this moment fighting the enemy. But what does Generalissimo Chiang say? What is he doing? He has ordered forty divisions stationed near Peiping and Tientsin and in areas along the Great Wall not to resist Japan but to keep an eye on our own fighting troops! In a shameless decree issued to the troops and people anxious to resist the Japanese, he has threatened, 'Those who talk wildly about fighting Japan shall be executed without mercy. . . .'"

"Down with the Japanese invaders!"

"Down with the shameless Kuomintang traitors!"

As these angry shouts punctuated Lu Chia-chuan's speech, a volley of shots rang out. The students looked round in alarm.

"Fellow students! Comrades! The rule of reaction must soon come to an end. The people are standing up!" Holding himself erect, dignified and unruffled, Lu Chia-chuan seemed oblivious of the violent rifle-fire as he calmly concluded: "Well, doesn't the poet Shelley say, 'If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?' "

"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" echoed the students with conviction.

"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" whispered Tao-ching, her eyes wet with tears of excitement.

The frenzied crack of rifles rent the sky, throwing the meeting into disorder. Some of the demonstrators shouted slogans at the top of their voices, others started running in all directions. Tao-ching glanced nervously from the girl beside her to Lu Chia-chuan, both of whom were still calmly standing there, as if waiting for some signal. The sight steadied her nerves and involuntarily she edged nearer to them. Looking up at Lu Chia-chuan, she wondered anxiously, "Why doesn't he make a move?"

Then Lu Chia-chuan, after listening to reports from their scouts, waved his arms and called for order. "Fellow students! Comrades!" he cried. "The die-hards are using force again; we are encircled! But brave fighters can never be intimidated. Even with bare fists or stones we will fight them to the bitter end. Let's break through this encirclement! To the street! On with the parade!"

The students, confused a moment before, now rallied, and with stones in their pockets they marched forward, eight abreast and arm-in-arm, shouting slogans as they headed for the gates of the Red Building. The girl with bobbed hair, who was at the head of the group in which Tao-ching found herself, calmly led the way. Tao-ching kept close to her, head high, boldly marching forward.

Arise, you pris'ners of starvation!
Arise, you wretched of the earth!
For justice thunders condemnation,
A better world's in birth.

The passionate strains of the *Internationale* burst like a torrent through the intermittent rifle-fire, to float away across the wide spring sky. The students, now on their mettle, formed more regular ranks.

"Halt! Or we fire!" The black-uniformed police with their rifles were acting as if these defenceless boys and girls were an enemy army a million strong. Brandishing bayonets, rifles and clubs, they converged from all directions. Lo Ta-fang could contain himself no longer. Appearing at the head of the students' ranks as if from nowhere, he thundered in a voice that rent the air:

"Keep going! On to the streets! Follow the trail of the March the Eighteenth martyrs!"

As with one voice, the crowd echoed indignantly:

"Keep going! On to the streets! Follow the trail of the March the Eighteenth martyrs!"

But before their vanguard reached the gates they had to come to grips with the police and soldiers. Shouting and yelling, both sides milled about in utter disorder, stones were pitted against rifle butts and bayonets. The police and soldiers, unable to check the marchers' advance, began to fire over the crowd, while the students hurled stones at them in answer to this challenge. As they were engaged in this battle, ambushed police and gendarmes emerged from the rear and started to make arrests.

"Beat these hangmen to death! Down with the Kuomintang!" shouted the students in fury.

"Seize all the Reds working for Russian roubles!" yelled back the officers.

In the mêlée Tao-ching lost sight of Lu Chia-chuan and the girl student who had been beside her. Having thrown all her stones, she was at a loss what to do. By this time, the police were savagely laying about the students with pistols and clubs. Many students were bruised and bleeding from wounds on the head, some were being tied up and dragged away. Tao-ching received a blow from a club, but dodged the policeman who was on the point of seizing her, and darted into another group. The next moment she saw with horror that the girl from Peking University was engaged in a scuffle with a fat man in a broadcloth uniform. The thin, frail girl was a brave fighter. She had manoeuvred to catch hold of the fat fellow's collar and was scratching his face and biting his hands like a fury. The fat man, panting like an ox, reeled and struck back, ripping her faded gown off her shoulders.

"Yen Keng! You brute! Cursed chief of the Inner Sixth Ward! How many young patriots have you arrested?" Her voice was hoarse, and she seemed ready to kill the ward chief. The fact was that Yen Keng had caught sight of this slender girl while directing his underlings' activities, and fancied he could amuse himself at her expense. Much to his dismay, however, his scheme was foiled; for this slight, delicate girl proved more than a match for the fat ward chief. When he realized that his minions were not at hand and that students were rushing up threateningly, he squealed like a pig being slaughtered.

"Here, men! Quick! Run them in!"

"You cur! What are you yelling for? Now see what iron fists the people have!" Students sprang upon him, kicking and cuffing to such good effect that in a few moments he was black

and blue. His features contorted, he grovelled at their feet, unable to rise.

"Help! Help! I'm done for!" His yells of terror mingled with the angry shouts of those belabouring him, causing the students to laugh loudly.

Rushing over to the brave girl student, Tao-ching caught hold of her and pulled out a handkerchief to wipe the blood from the girl's face; but at that moment a volley of shots rang out, and in the confusion which followed they were separated. The armed police had come to Yen Keng's rescue. Angry and humiliated, still shaking with fright, the fat ward chief pointed towards a group of students and croaked:

"Get her first! Get her first! What a bitch!"

The frail girl darted through another group and was gone like the wind, the pursuers hot on her heels. Tao-ching watched with fearful anxiety as the police overtook her, but just as she was wondering what to do, the student whirled around, and with all the strength left to her, butted full tilt into the foremost of her pursuers. As he staggered from the impact, she turned to make good her escape, running nimbly through the crowd, still followed by the police and the fat ward chief, who had no eyes for any of the others. Tao-ching, running behind them, saw that the girl was making for the Red Building.

"Stop her! Stop her!" At the entrance to the Red Building the girl was seized by a policeman's large, ruthless hands. Tao-ching halted, stunned. In the nick of time, however, the policeman received a vigorous kick which sent him staggering. Tao-ching, rushing to the scene, saw that this was the work of Lu Chia-chuan. Forgetting their common danger in her joy, she ran up to him crying:

"Brother Lu! Brother Lu! . . ." But instead of answering, he looked quickly right and left, then motioned the girl, Tao-ching, and two male students to a wooden door. Pushing them through the doorway, he whispered urgently:

"Quick! Nip through here down to the cellar, then turn right. In the printing house you'll find yourselves in safe hands."

Without allowing Tao-ching time to speak, the other girl caught hold of her and, acting on their instructions, the four of them groped their way in the dark, down to the cellar of the Red Building.

There was very little light down there and they could hardly see where they were going. The moment they turned to the right, they were accosted by a young printer, who whispered:

"Hide here for a moment till all's clear again."

"Thank you!" said the girl student, taking the workman's hand without any constraint. Together they entered a small room filled with junk. The workman, having ushered the two girls in, put out the light, locked the door and led the two lads to another hiding-place.

Though Tao-ching was glad that they were now out of danger, her heart sank when she thought of Lu Chia-chuan and Lo Ta-fang, who had been leading the others in shouting slogans. With the police so close behind them, how could they escape? In the darkness, she felt for the other girl's hand and asked:

"Do you think anything will happen to him — I mean to Lu Chia-chuan, and Lo Ta-fang?"

"I think they'll be all right," answered the student in a muffled voice as she held Tao-ching's hand. "The police today were mostly from the Inner Sixth Ward, and they're a set of stupid fools. Old Lu is clever and cautious. He knows how to deal with them. I'm sure he won't let them catch him. So you know Ta-fang too?" She sounded surprised.

"Yes, I do." Tao-ching's thoughts were again in a turmoil. Sitting silently on a packing case, she relived the furious struggle through which they had just passed, and a hatred she had never known before surged up in her heart. For the first time in her life, she had witnessed the brutal measures adopted by the reactionaries against honest young patriots. She had a greater appreciation of the courage of Lu Chia-chuan, Lo Ta-fang and the others who had shed blood and faced death without a qualm. What a contrast to her own timid hesitation! She moved her head involuntarily to look at the girl beside her. Though she could not see her companion's face in the dark, she had a vivid picture in her mind of the resolute eyes and the small hands that had wrought such havoc with the ward chief. A sense of unworthiness and shame weighed heavily on her.

"What's your name?" This softly spoken inquiry cut short Tao-ching's reflections. After answering, she asked the other girl her name.

"Hsu Hui?" Tao-ching was at once amazed and delighted. "I know about you! When the students went south to stage that demonstration, you were one of the leaders. . . ."

"Don't talk so loudly! There's no need to get excited! . . ." Hsu Hui covered Tao-ching's mouth with her hand and spoke under her breath. "I suppose you've heard of me from Hsu Ning? I've known about you for a long time too."

They lapsed into a companionable silence. Now that the ice was broken, they felt as if they had known each other for years, and in the dark clasped hands more firmly than ever.

More than two hours passed. It must have been past noon when a printer unlocked their door and switched on the light. That same instant Tao-ching saw Lu Chia-chuan in a worker's overalls standing by the door. Beside herself with joy, she seized his hand and cried:

"Brother Lu, are you all right? . . ."

As calm and composed as ever, he smiled and shook hands.

"Come on out. The worthy police have beaten a 'victorious' retreat."

Hsu Hui also stepped eagerly to his side to ask in a low voice:

"How did it go? Are the casualties heavy?"

"Forty arrested, two dead. . . . We have no figures yet of the wounded. Ta-fang was taken. . . ."

"Ta-fang!" Lu Chia-chuan, the workman and Hsu Hui bowed their heads without a word. And Tao-ching, her head also lowered, clearly pictured Lo Ta-fang's sturdy, courageous figure.

"The struggle means blood must be shed. It's a fight to the finish. . . ." The theories she had read were being borne out by facts.

Some time after the others had gone, Lu Chia-chuan led Tao-ching through the back gate of Peking University. Keeping to small alleys, they bypassed Tien An Men and made for the west city. At first they walked at a good pace without speaking; but when they were some distance from the university, Lu Chia-chuan drew closer to Tao-ching and asked:

"Did you come to the parade alone today?"

"Yes!" She nodded, somewhat abashed. "Hsu Ning told me to get others to join, but — they refused."

"Why did they refuse?"

"They refused after hearing me speak of our principles and supporting the Soviet Union. I suppose they were too backward or afraid to join."

Lu Chia-chuan did not answer. Deep in thought he stared straight ahead, absorbed in some difficult problem. Tao-ching, stealing a glance at him, wondered whether she had said something wrong.

"Tao-ching, you've reminded me of something," he said as they passed the deserted bank of Shihchahai, a rank pool of stagnant water at the back of Peihai Park. "It's true that people can't accept all our slogans. Each time we hold commemoration meetings or parades, there are many arrests and casualties. What's the real reason? . . ." He was talking quietly to himself, as if forgetting that Tao-ching was beside him. She looked at him in astonishment, not knowing what he was driving at.

Turning back to her, he presently asked, "What was your impression of today?" Tao-ching did her best to keep her excited voice down, "My impression? Well, I hardly know where to start! I feel I've learned much more than from the books and even from all you've told me. It was as if I suddenly grew wings and was soaring high into the sky, so that I had a broader vision of the world. . . ." She gave a very naive smile, and after a pause asked abruptly: "Why didn't Hsu Ning join the parade? He told me he was going."

Lu Chia-chuan chuckled. "It's no good growing wings and soaring up to the sky. You'd much better keep your feet on the ground and steel yourself in the crucible of the mass struggle. As for Hsu Ning, I dare say he was enjoying himself with Pai Li-ping. Or maybe he was afraid. Weren't you afraid, Tao-ching? Next time we take action of this kind, will you join in?"

Tao-ching, who looked up to Lu Chia-chuan as to her teacher, pouted like a child who has been misunderstood.

"Brother Lu, you ought to trust me and understand me. . . . I'm not such a coward. I often vow to myself that I'll learn from you brave revolutionaries — I've learned a lot during the last two months, and today I learned even more. . . . You don't know how grateful I am to you all, for giving me such happiness." Pearly tears sparkled on her long lashes, she was too overcome with emotion to say more.

Lu Chia-chuan, touched by her enthusiasm, her courage and revolutionary spirit, stepped up to her and could not resist taking her hands. For some time he gazed at her without a word.

"Tao-ching, I've something to do," he whispered. "I'd better leave you here." He had himself under control now, moved as he was by the depth of her feelings. "Go home quickly. Old Yu must be frantic with worry."

Tao-ching blushed and murmured in some embarrassment: "Brother Lu, why do you tease me? It hurts. . . ." After a moment's silence she continued, "Don't go yet. Tell me how Ta-fang was taken. I remember him starting up the *Internationale*."

"Well, some police were just going to carry off two girl students when Old Lo rushed to their rescue and, with a couple of heavy blows from his enormous fists, he sent two of them sprawling. That made him the chief target of attack, and the two girls were able to escape while he — was arrested." Though Lu Chia-chuan's tone was as calm as usual, she could sense the anguish in his heart. Without giving her a chance to reply, he went on hastily, "Sorry, I've some business to attend to. Let's say goodbye."

"Goodbye! But do come to see me whenever you've time!"

She was reluctant to leave Lu Chia-chuan, in whose presence she felt safe, fearless and strong, but they had to go their different ways. When he looked back and saw her quiet, distressed face, he said with a smile:

"Yes, I promise to drop in some time, but. . . ." Without finishing, he strode away. Today, with so many students arrested, killed or wounded, he had to attend to urgent matters. That was why he could only accompany Tao-ching part of the way, and had to leave her so hurriedly.

Standing beneath the shade of a willow, she watched his figure recede into the distance. She stood there, as if in a daze, long after he had passed out of sight.

Chapter 16

Yung-tse woke from his dreams that morning to find Tao-ching no longer by his side. When he had listened intently and made sure that she was not lighting the fire or cleaning the room, he bounded out of bed, opened the door a little, and peered into the courtyard — no one was there. He slammed the door with such a bang that the window paper rustled; then, returning listlessly to bed, he closed his eyes and muttered:

"This is the end! I thought I was happy, but I've just been making bridal clothes for others to wear. . . ." His hatchet face twitched with a terrible expression of frustration. Having lost all desire to get up or bestir himself, he recalled the means he had used the previous night to persuade Tao-ching to stay at home. All his soft words had been wasted, for the headstrong girl had slipped away and left him without a word, gone to join some demonstration to commemorate March the Eighteenth. Wounded pride made him thoroughly irritated and wretched as he lay in bed wondering how he could continue living with such a girl and what was to become of their love. Then a vision of Lu Chia-chuan's smiling face enraged him. Throwing off the bed-clothes, he jumped out of bed and, without stopping to wash or have any breakfast, trudged to the library behind the Red Building.

The library had been his refuge for some months now. Whenever he felt frustrated or powerless to deal with Tao-ching, whenever the stirring times and realization that he had lost the enthusiasm of youth filled him with conflicting emotions or with shame, he would hurriedly seek refuge in the library. In these quiet, soothing surroundings, the struggle and stress of the outside world were shut out; here people concentrated on reading and left each other alone. Invariably, when in a bad mood, he would go to the reading-room and bury himself in books for several hours; thumbing through the thick volumes of classical Chinese helped him to forget everything else. If he was lucky enough to find books or passages which he could use in his research work, he forgot all his troubles and became positively cheerful.

While the commemoration meeting was being held behind the Red Building, and the demonstrators were shouting impassioned slogans or battling furiously with the police and soldiers, Yung-tse sat on a hard-wood chair musing in the library. He was completely wrapped up in his own affairs, as if the outside world were no concern of his. At first he was too upset and angry to concentrate, but when he looked up and saw the familiar faces of fellow students here and there at the long desks, he grew calmer and was soon able to apply himself single-mindedly to his studies.

"Down with Japanese imperialism! Down with the Kuomintang trators who are selling the country!" From time to time these stirring slogans penetrated into the library, disturbing its serenity, as a placid stream is disturbed when mischievous children throw pebbles into it. These tremors passed swiftly and the studious readers simply raised their heads with a frown and looked out of the window uneasily for a moment before recovering their peace of mind.

Yung-tse was leafing through a book when he thought of some lines by Tsao Meng-teh.

Drink and sing while you may,
For life is short;
Like the morning dew,
Too soon it fades away! . . .

Suddenly weighed down by an indefinable sense of disillusion, he laid aside his book and wandered to the window. There were splashes of tender green on the branches outside; the peach blossom was unfolding in the warm sun, and the air was sweet with the fresh fragrance of spring. As he looked out, his thoughts again turned to Tao-ching. What was she doing on this beautiful spring morning? . . . Soon he was once more dreaming, his Tao-ching was not shouting herself hoarse in the crowd, not taking part in a fierce struggle to fight for her ideals. In his imagination he saw her as she had been on the beach, slender and lovely as a fairy with her snow-white skin, dressed in white, her great eyes full of love, waiting for his arrival. . . . In his mental agony, he longed for her as intensely as if he had not seen her for years, as if she had gone away from him for ever.

The sound of rifle shots, sharp and clear, snapped through the tangled skein of his thoughts. Then a furious shouting and a disquieting din made his heart beat fast with fear.

"What's happened?" he asked of another student who was also staring uneasily into the distance. "Rifle-fire! Listen! It's coming from the sports ground. . . ." The knowledge that Tao-ching was on the sports ground was more than he could stand. Several other students who had been absorbed in their books were unable to remain in their seats any longer. Even the librarians stepped outside with the rest to look about and try to determine the source of the tumult.

Another sharp volley of gun-fire was heard.

"No, this won't do! I must go and look for her!" Without further hesitation, Yung-tse ran off.

The university library was not far from the sports ground.

Once out of the gate, he ran a few steps to the east and then climbed a mound which commanded a view of the playing-field. He saw the clash between the police and students — yells and angry curses, the glitter of bayonets, the swish of clubs, the stones hurled back and forth, and the casualties lying in pools of blood — the fearful scene and tumult filled him with terror. His feet seemed nailed to the spot, he could hardly move. Fighting down his agitation, he closely watched the disorderly throng in the hope of locating Tao-ching. If only she could get out, he would run to meet her, but she was nowhere to be seen. Where could she be? Had she been knocked down? Or even worse. . . . The more anxious he grew, the more firmly did his feet seem rooted to the ground.

His conscience was beginning to prick him, and he felt ashamed. "If so many others aren't afraid, if even she isn't afraid, why should I be?" he asked himself. He had meant to rush over to the crowd and rescue Tao-ching as he had done that stormy night on the beach in Peitaiho, but his native shrewdness made him well aware that this time the situation was quite different and he must go carefully. He had just decided to do nothing rash when a shot rang out and a bullet whizzed past his head. Panic seized him, his face turned ashy grey and his fingers trembled. Fearful that he was wounded and about to fall, he stared wildly around to see if the ground was still firm beneath his feet. Raising one enfeebled arm to his head, he found it still intact — the bullet had not even grazed his skin. He was relieved to find himself safe and sound. Then he heard another bullet whistle past, and, abandoning all thought of Tao-ching and not stopping to find out whether he was hurt or not, he took to his heels. His first impulse was to run as far from the university as he could; but, on reflecting that no one could outdistance a bullet, no matter how fast he ran, he slipped back into the library grounds and then staggered to the main reading-room.

By noon he was very hungry. The clamour had now died down and the library was deserted when he rose slowly from his seat, cleared away his books and notes and walked wretchedly out. Without even daring to look in the direction of the sports ground, he went straight back to his lodgings.

Tao-ching was not yet back, and he had to light the stove, after which he listlessly swept the floor and cleared up the disorder in the dismal room. While the noodles were cooking, he wiped the table which was covered with dust, muttering, "It's no home without a woman. Darling, come back soon!"

Chapter 17

At dawn the luxuriant ash-trees that lined Peihoyen Street were veiled in a heavy mist as the ancient city dreamed on in silence. But Lu Chia-chuan, who had spent the night in the Third Hostel of Peking University, was already out of bed. He had snatched a few hours' sleep in Hsu Ning's room on the first floor, sharing his friend's narrow iron bed and getting up while Hsu Ning was still fast asleep. Passing his fingers through his tousled hair, he gently pushed the door open. A breath of fresh air drifted in and, standing on tiptoe, he embarked vigorously on some deep breathing exercises. Though he was tired and his eyes were bloodshot owing to lack of sleep, his face was as full of vitality and youthful exuberance as the fine spring morning. Standing alone in the corridor, he seemed completely relaxed, but his keen eyes were scanning the mist-shrouded university grounds in every direction and even glancing over the wall. The White terror had taught him to be constantly on the alert, and he was being doubly careful because, during the last few days, the premises of certain Communist Party organizations had been raided and more comrades arrested. Chiang Kai-shek had sent the Third Regiment of Military Police and his faithful henchman Chiang Hsiao-hsien to Peiping, and the local revolutionary bodies had suffered heavy losses. The situation was critical. Each revolutionary had to be on his guard every moment of the day.

His silent inspection showed nothing amiss, but just as he was about to turn back into the room, he saw a motor-car speed up to the Third Hostel gate and stop there. In an instant several suspicious-looking individuals in Western suits as well as some plain-clothes military police appeared as from nowhere. Lu Chia-chuan had no need to look further. He slipped behind a pillar and hastened back into Hsu Ning's room. Shaking his friend to wake him, he said:

"Hsu Ning! The bastards are here to make an arrest! Tidy things up a bit, quick! I mustn't stay here."

"Where can you go? It's too late now to get out safely." Hsu Ning's lean arms barred the way.

"No, I can't stay here. They don't suspect you yet. . . . I mustn't be found in this room. If they get me, please tell Hsu Hui as soon as possible." So saying, he pushed past Hsu Ning and disappeared.

The hostel was soon in a ferment. Contingents of military police armed with pistols appeared on the scene. After failing to find Lu Chia-chuan in Wu Ta-kang's room, where he had often spent the night, they divided themselves into small groups and started to ransack the building. Three of them, followed by a special-service man in plain clothes, rushed into Hsu Ning's room and found him curled up in his quilt still sleeping.

"Wake up, damn you! Get up!" A scrawny hand seized Hsu Ning by the throat.

Hsu Ning, apparently startled from his dreams, gazed blankly at the police standing before his bed.

"Is there a fellow named Lu in your room? He's not a student of this university."

Hsu Ning was relieved and overjoyed to deduce from this that Lu Chia-chuan had not been arrested. But where could his resourceful friend be hiding? Without answering the question, he stammered, "What's that? Do you mean that someone has sneaked into my room? Well, go ahead and look for him! I'll help you." So saying, he jumped out of bed and began to hunt here and there as if in real earnest.

The police made a thorough search, looking into the bed and under it. Then, convinced that no one was hiding in this small room, they swarmed out, banging the door behind them.

Upstairs and downstairs, all was now in utter confusion. The thud of heavy boots, loud curses and the crash of objects being flung on the floor made a discordant symphony, disturbing the quiet of this imposing seat of higher learning and striking terror into all hearts.

On the first floor landing there was a small room marked "Janitor". The door was ajar and the place appeared deserted. A young policeman came up, scrutinized the wooden sign, kicked the door open and entered. Its window was shut, and the room was dark and stuffy. As the policeman recoiled to pull the door wide open, he saw an old man on a bed of boards. He was lying with his face to the wall. He wore a small night-cap, had a white towel round his forehead, was muffled in a heavy quilt and kept groaning — he might well be suffering from some serious contagious disease! The policeman frowned and spat, then giving the door another violent kick, he hastily turned away.

The search started at six in the morning and lasted until ten. Yet, though the hostel was ransacked from top to bottom, these experts in "suppressing Communists" from the Third Regiment of the Military Police and the Kuomintang city headquarters failed to find Lu Chia-chuan, whose arrest would have brought them some reward or commendation. They left the university in anger, taking some students with them.

On the first floor, the janitor's door still remained half open. For four hours while the police passed back and forth, Lu Chia-chuan had lain quietly on Old Wang's bed.

When the sound of indignant protests and angry curses by the students carried to the janitor's room, Lu Chia-chuan knew that the police and special-service men had left. He jumped out of bed. Just as he was about to divest himself of the night-cap and towel, Old Wang hurried in. The strange apparition of a young man in his grey gown and night-cap gave the old janitor quite a shock; but as soon as he recognized Lu Chia-chuan, who often came to that compound, he grasped the situation. He took Lu by the arm and said:

"What a narrow escape! Those men were from the Third Regiment of Military Police. Perhaps you were one of those they were after?"

"Perhaps! If they don't arrest more common citizens, how can they grow rich?" With this, Lu Chia-chuan took off the grey gown, folded the quilt, swept the floor and opened the window. Old Wang, a kettle in his hand, looked on nervously, thinking, "What a tight spot to be in! Yet this young fellow can smile at me in such a friendly way. And he's calmly helping to tidy up the room." The old man was tremendously impressed. In his long life he had seen a great deal and met all sorts of people, but few young men like Lu Chia-chuan. Forgetting his duties, he hobbled forward and muttered:

"Pah! This bunch that call themselves the national government and followers of Sun Yat-sen, they're worse — if you'll let me speak my mind — worse than bandits! I've seen a thing or two, I don't mind telling you. If an honest young fellow says anything about saving the country and resisting Japan, or reads a book with a red cover, that gang fumes as if someone were digging up their ancestors' graves! Then they label him a Communist bandit, a Red or a trouble-maker in the university. A man's only one head to lose — and that's the end of him. The number of fine young chaps I've seen taken off one after another before my eyes!" With a deep sigh, he continued, "It's too much! Tell me, Mr. Lu, what's this world coming to? . . ."

Lu Chia-chuan stood there listening with interest as the old man sputtered on till the janitor opened his eyes wide and changed his tune. "But you must be very busy, sir, so I won't waste your time talking. I think the world of men like you. I've had a number of friends among the students, all your sort, but quite a few of them have been arrested. . . . Well, I mustn't run on like this, I'm keeping you. Don't go just yet, though. Let me have a look first to see if the coast is clear. There may still be some of those bastards hanging about. Just wait a moment."

Taking up the big kettle, Old Wang crept out of the room.

Lu Chia-chuan sat waiting till the old man came back. Old Wang told him that spies were still skulking round the gate, so there he had to stay till evening. At seven o'clock he was in a student's room dressed in a smart Western suit, then, taking advantage of the bustle at dusk, he swaggered out of the gate of the Third Hostel, whistling. He could easily have passed for a young dandy.

Lu Chia-chuan had been born in Loting in the province of Hopei, where his father was a teacher in a village school. Thanks to the work of Li Ta-chao* and his popularity in that area, Lu Chia-chuan, as a boy, came into contact with the revolution. Later, when studying in a high school in Peiping, he often went to see Li Ta-chao whose patient guidance and influence sharpened his political consciousness and made him a staunch revolutionary. He worked for the revolution in his high school, and as soon as he entered Peking University he became a responsible member of the Communist Party organization there. After his return from the demonstration in Nanking, the enemy began to spy on him and attempts were made to arrest him; so he was transferred to lead the revolutionary movement in high schools and colleges in the east part of the city.

In the summer of 1933, the Party organization in Peiping suffered terrible losses at the hands of the enemy. Those Party members who survived the White terror were in constant danger of arrest. Consequently Lu Chia-chuan had no fixed residence. He might put up for half a night at Chaoyang University and spend the other at the Catholic University. Though the police raids were craftily planned, his ingenuity and resilience, reinforced by the loyalty and courage of a true Communist, snatched him time and again from the jaws of death.

It was dusk when he left the Third Hostel and the streets of the ancient city were thronged. Picking his way through the crowd, he set off for the place where a Party meeting of the east city's district committee was to be held. While walking he glanced casually over his shoulder and, finding that no one was trailing him, hastened his steps. When he passed a stall selling baked cakes, a pang of hunger reminded him that during all the excitement that day he had not had a bite to eat. He smiled and, fumbling in his pocket, found that he had only twenty cents. This sum must last him for two days, so he only bought three small baked cakes at the next stall. He put them in his pockets, for although his stomach was clamouring for food it would have to wait. To start eating on the main road, in his borrowed finery, would look too out of character.

Presently he turned into a small lane inside Ti An Men and stopped at a gate from which the paint had peeled. When he saw a broken brick resting against the gate-post, a faint smile passed over his face. He pulled out the baked cakes and ate them ravenously.

Reaching the inner courtyard and the room facing north, he waved his hat and shouted with a toss of his head:

"Hey! It takes four to play mahjong. Have I kept you waiting?" In that instant he was again a gay young spark.

A thin, delicate-looking woman of between thirty and forty years of age was the first to rise and grasp his hands. Looking at him intently, she whispered:

"Comrade, you're late! We all thought something must have happened to you."

"No, Big Sister Liu — how could it?" He glanced at the square table with the mahjong set where a woman and two men were sitting. They nodded and smiled at him. The woman, who was young and smartly dressed, stood up and motioned to him to take her seat, after which she withdrew with another nod and smile.

The mahjong pieces clattered for a few moments. When the noise died down, Lu Chia-chuan looked at his comrades and quietly said:

"Everything is as it should be — shall we begin?"

The Party secretary of the district committee was a man of about twenty-five called Tai Yu. It was he who had spoken before Lu Chia-chuan at the meeting to commemorate the March the Eighteenth Incident. Behind his spectacles, his eyes bulged like those of a goldfish. He solemnly declared:

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*Li Ta-chao (1888-1927) was one of the earliest revolutionaries to disseminate Marxism-Leninism in China and a founder of the Chinese Communist Party. He was executed by the northern warlord Chang Tso-lin in April 1927.

"The meeting is open."

First they discussed how to celebrate May 1, International Labour Day. But before any final decision was reached, Tai Yu fixed his eyes on Lu Chia-chuan and said sternly:

"Comrade Feng Shen's* mistakes have become increasingly serious. I propose that we discuss this question now. We all know that the reactionary rule of the Kuomintang is facing a crisis graver than at any previous time, and that the high tide of the revolution is drawing near. We should be preparing for large-scale action such as arming the masses, organizing strikes among the students, the troops and the tradesmen, and making the victories that our Party has scored known to all. We should also be expanding our membership. Yet instead of doing these things we are discussing empty theories and ideological questions with petty-bourgeois intellectuals. We should know that these middle-of-the-road elements are most unreliable and vacillating. They are the reserve forces of the bourgeoisie!" He took off his spectacles and shuffled the mahjong pieces with a clatter before proceeding, "We mustn't allow things to go on like this. Feng Shen's Right opportunism has developed to intolerable proportions. Furthermore, it has come to my ears that he has been propagating communism to the wife of a reactionary university student. Her name is Lin Tao-ching, isn't that right? I disapprove strongly of Comrade Feng Shen's action here. . . ."

Big Sister Liu kept her head bent and her eyes averted, grating the mahjong pieces together in her hands. The other man, plump and sallow Wu Fang, was also silent. Lu Chia-chuan looked Tai Yu steadily in the face as he listened attentively. When Tai Yu had finished, Lu's face became solemn and stern.

"Comrade Tai Yu," he said slowly, "your opinions are one-sided and subjective. I hope you will open your eyes to look calmly at conditions in our country and see them in their true light. At present the whole nation is demanding resistance to Japan, so it is the duty of the Party to lead the resistance to Japan. Any slogans or demands which are too advanced will alienate us from the masses." His features reflected his distress, he turned pale and his voice became very solemn. "You've got to understand what the people need most and what they are most concerned about. . . . As for carrying on propaganda work among intellectuals, that is the job assigned to me by the Party. In his *Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society*, the first thing Comrade Mao Tsetung tells us is that we must distinguish friends from foes. He says the petty-bourgeoisie is our closest friend and that even the left wing of the middle class may be won over. . . . And don't forget, Comrade Tai Yu, neither you nor I are of working-class origin."

As for Lin Tao-ching, he said nothing in her defence, considering the whole matter as being beside the point.

"What?" Tai Yu's sallow face flushed with rage. "This is opportunism! You say the middle class can also be our friend? What a fearful idea!" He panted for breath, rolled his protuberant eyes, then launched into a high-sounding speech in opposition to Lu Chia-chuan's patient and conscientious attempts to educate intellectuals. On and on he droned, as if he had forgotten that they were living under the brutal White terror and that it was essential to save time and solve problems. When Lu Chia-chuan could stand it no longer, he pushed the mahjong pieces aside and rose abruptly to his feet.

"Comrade Tai Yu, one moment!" he cried in a hushed voice. "Would you mind listening to my opinion?" With a sweep of his arms, he took his seat again. "I agree with you in some respects." He was doing his best to speak mildly. "It is true that we should work resolutely to carry out the task given by the higher Party organizations, that is, to enlist more members. But as things stand now, how many new Party members can we enlist? Ever since the arrival of the Third Regiment of

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* Lu Chia-chuan's alias.

Military Police, the White terror has become more and more rampant. And Chiang Kai-shek, with the help of German and Italian fascists, has trained all these special-service men like blood-hounds to hunt us down. Among the people there's complete confusion. Most of the organizations close to the Party have broken up, the rest are so disorganized that it is equally hard for them to expand. That being so, I think the Party should adopt a safer and steadier policy for the time being. Instead of isolating itself unnecessarily by fully exposing itself, it should try to preserve its strength. But in the March Eighteenth Massacre, we lost so many comrades."

"But what?" Tai Yu cut him short. "Comrade Feng Shen, the present tension is only temporary while the possibility of victory encourages all revolutionaries to stride forward. . . . Should we halt our steps for fear of losing our lives? . . ."

"One moment, Comrade Tai Yu! Allow me to say a few words!" Big Sister Liu could contain herself no longer. Her thin, lined face was flushed and her breathing laboured. "Don't just quote dogma, comrade! I think Feng Shen's views are worth considering." Pushing the mahjong pieces towards Tai Yu and Wu Fang, who was sitting motionless, she said firmly, "In the main, I agree with Feng Shen. Comrade Tai Yu is simply making dogmatic statements without understanding the actual situation. For a long time I've been as depressed as Feng Shen; for a long time we have shared the same feelings. Though our Party leadership has overcome the rash, adventurist Li Li-san line,* isn't the present line still not very sound? To resist Japan and save the country is what the people want with all their heart, but the slogans we put forward are often so advanced that with the exception of a few enthusiasts the masses find them unacceptable. For this reason I believe. . . ." Her voice dropped till it became inaudible and she left the rest of her arguments unspoken.

The four of them fell silent. Even the irascible Tai Yu kept his mouth shut. Nothing could be heard but the dull, intermittent clatter of the mahjong pieces. To break the silence, Big Sister Liu looked round and said softly, "Tai Yu, I can tell you something about that girl whom you say Feng Shen should have nothing to do with. I happen to know her. She's a progressive who's rebelled against the old society and is longing for the help of the Communist Party. It's our duty to help and educate her. I think Feng Shen is right."

"It all depends." Wu Fang, silent hitherto, spoke up at last. "If she married a reactionary student her outlook must naturally be questionable. At any rate, our Party's class line is very important. So I, too, want to warn Feng Shen to be particularly vigilant when dealing with petty-bourgeois intellectuals. It's better to deviate to the left than to the right."

"Yes, better to veer to the left than to the right," agreed Tai Yu hastily.

Fingering the mahjong pieces, Lu Chia-chuan shook his head calmly. "Rather leftist than rightist? No, that's no way to put it. Marxism-Leninism must be integrated with the actual conditions of China. Only in this way can the Party's cause develop. Anyhow, I accept your warning. I'll be more on my guard. If there is nothing more important to talk about, I propose we resume our discussion as to what to do on May Day."

"Yes, let's talk about the May Day celebrations!" Wu Fang brightened. "As to the question which is 'Left' opportunism and which is Right opportunism, I think it's hard for us here to reach any conclusion. After all, as Party members we must do our best to carry out the decisions made by the Party leadership."

The fashionably dressed girl re-entered and, glancing at the four of them, murmured, "Everything is all right. Carry on!" She slipped out again.

Tai Yu seemed to have much more on his mind, but he contented himself with saying, "All right. We'll go into this question some other time."

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*Referring to the "Left" opportunist line followed by the Party for a short time in 1930 and represented by Li Li-san, then the most influential leader in the Party. It denied the need of building up mass strength and refused to recognize the unevenness of revolutionary development. It opposed Mao Tsetung's idea that for a long time the Party should devote its attention mainly to creating rural base areas, use the rural areas to encircle the cities and thus win country-wide victory, and advocated immediate uprisings in the major cities.

Once more they discussed the May Day celebrations. In Tai Yu's opinion, the Communist Party, the Communist Youth League and progressive organizations like the Socialist League and the Left-Wing Writers' Union, should mobilize all their members for a large parade. After some thought, Lu Chia-chuan looked up at Tai Yu and said:

"Several days ago, at the parade to commemorate Comrade Li Ta-chao's funeral,* many of our people were arrested. We are now in a critical position. I am sure that on May Day the enemy will take greater precautions and resort to even more drastic measures. I hope you'll talk the matter over in detail with the city committee. I'm afraid that. . . ."

"This is sheer cowardice!" cut in Tai Yu, ripping off his glasses with a frown. "Feng Shen, are you trying to sabotage the work? . . . This is a sacred task assigned to us by the Party. Any doubt concerning this mission is shameless vacillation!" He dabbed at the corners of his mouth with a handkerchief before pushing away the mahjong pieces. When the others followed his example, a loud clatter took the place of their heated argument. After the noise died down, Lu Chia-chuan's pale face resumed its natural colour. Looking into Tai Yu's prominent eyes, he said in his usual, measured tones:

"Comrade Tai Yu, you needn't worry about me. Whatever task the Party gives me, I will do without argument. But you must allow me to express my own views. Maybe they are wrong. Maybe my estimate is entirely mistaken, but at least you should be clear-headed enough to see whether I am really a selfish coward or not. . . ." Unable to go on, he bent his head.

"Well, let us resolutely carry out the instructions of the city committee," said Wu Fang. "Let us do our best to arouse as many people as we can, that's all."

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* A funeral parade was held in April 1933 by the Party's underground organizations in Peiping to commemorate Comrade Li Ta-chao's death six years before.

"It's all very well to arouse people," put in Big Sister Liu quickly, with a worried air. "But it's not so good to let them go to gaol once they've been roused."

There was silence, during which a mute argument continued in their blazing eyes till Tai Yu calmed down sufficiently to say:

"Well, if Feng Shen and you others don't object to a large-scale demonstration, we'll stir up the masses to gather at the Bridge of Heaven on May Day. You'll be notified later of particulars."

And so the meeting broke up.

As they rose to go, the smartly-dressed girl went to the gate and, seeing no suspicious characters about, came back smiling and told them that the coast was clear. Tai Yu and Wu Fang were the first to leave. After they had gone, Lu Chia-chuan and Big Sister Liu walked slowly to the gate in the dim light of the new moon. At the entrance, Big Sister Liu stopped and grasped Lu Chia-chuan by the hand.

"Cheer up, Young Feng!" Her voice was low and measured. "The Party understands you. We all understand you. . . . On May Day you must be more vigilant. And remember, try to arouse as many people as you can."

For a while Lu Chia-chuan, his head low, did not utter a word. When he raised his head to look at her, his eyes were moist.

"Thank you, dear comrade!" He pressed her thin fingers tightly. "You needn't worry about me, Big Sister. To my mind, a Communist's determination to devote himself entirely to the Party rules out all personal considerations of loss or gain, glory or shame. I won't let what has just happened make any difference. . . . Well, let's say goodbye!"

Leaning against the mouldering gate, Big Sister Liu watched him walk off with firm, steady steps, and not till his figure vanished round the dark corner of the lane did she gently close the gate. She murmured, so low that none but herself could hear:

"Young Feng is a fine comrade! But why doesn't Tai Yu open his eyes and look round a bit more? . . ."

Chapter 18

One morning, after putting the rolls on to steam, Tao-ching seated herself by the window to read *A Short Course of Dialectics,* but when she found a small strip of red cloth hidden between the pages, she could not continue. Putting aside the book, she contemplated this wisp of bright red cloth as if it were a treasure, and a smile lit up her face as she murmured to herself:

"Ah, May Day! What a day that was!"

On May Day, that great commemorative day, Lu Chia-chuan had asked her to join another demonstration. She and several others of the same group had concealed themselves in an alley near the Bridge of Heaven. Lu Chia-chuan, coming up to hand them a pile of leaflets, asked if they had brought small flags and lime-powder with them, and as soon as he received an answer in the affirmative went on his way, leaving them to loiter in the alley for some time. At last a liaison officer appeared with orders to fall in at once on the road to the Bridge of Heaven. They raced out and were joined by other groups streaming simultaneously from other alleys, and soon formed an impressive contingent. Tao-ching longed to be near Lu Chia-chuan, for she felt safe and serene in his company, but he had a great deal to attend to and the next instant she saw that he was at the head of the column again. She was marching along in the serried ranks when suddenly a great red banner was unfurled to flame against the sky like a bright red sun rising out of fog and mist. Throwing back her head, she saw written in black ink on the banner:

WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

Her heart beat loud and fast. The enthusiastically shouted slogans, the leaflets hurled into the air, the shaking fists and the countless red flags fluttering in the breeze seemed to be making the earth tremble under their feet. . . . This lasted for a few moments only. Piercing blasts of police whistles, the roar of motor-cycles and the crack of rifle-fire rent the air. Once again, soldiers and police armed to the teeth charged up from every side.

Tao-ching's brow contracted as she fingered the scrap of cloth. Again Lu Chia-chuan's brave, handsome face rose vividly before her. The military and police had dispersed the crowd and were making arrests. It was Lu Chia-chuan's duty to protect the standard-bearer and he had rushed up when the latter's pole was broken and he was on the point of being seized. He dealt the thug who was molesting him a mighty blow and vigorously scattered lime. This created a sort of smoke-screen under cover of which the standard-bearer escaped, but the troops promptly turned their attention to Lu Chia-chuan. Tao-ching was running after him — he had waved her away, but she had ignored the signal, and ran as fast as she could in the same direction. Lu Chia-chuan was turning into a lane when a gendarme in grey fired two shots over his head. It seemed that in a few seconds he must be captured, but he whirled round and forcefully emptied a package into the air. Again the lime worked wonders, for the choking white mist that rose from it made the soldiers and police close their eyes, and thanks to this he succeeded in shaking them off. Tao-ching used the same means to secure her own escape. Then she met him, as previously arranged, in Joyous Pavilion Park, where after strolling arm-in-arm like lovers and exchanging a few words, they parted in haste. While they were walking together, she had seen a fragment of the torn red banner in his pocket and taken it as a precious souvenir of that glorious day.

"How brave he is, and how resourceful!" The thought of Lu Chia-chuan's exploits during the March the Eighteenth commemoration as well as on May Day roused her deepest admiration; indeed, other and more complex feelings had entered into her attitude towards him. She could not analyse these feelings; all she knew was that she longed to see more of him and to learn more from him.

After lunch Yung-tse went to a lecture and Tao-ching, seeing that Pai Li-ping was at home, dropped in for a chat.

Li-ping winked at her with a mischievous smile. "Hullo, kid! Did you join the May Day parade yesterday?"

"Yes, I did. Why didn't you turn up, Li-ping?"

"Me? Oh, I had other business to attend to!" Li-ping changed the subject abruptly, smiling as she threw an arm round Tao-ching's shoulders. "You had a row with your old man last night, didn't you, Tao-ching? Tell me, you silly child, why do you have to share your life with a fellow like that? Can't you find anyone better?" Li-ping always referred to Yung-tse as "old" because the long gown he wore made him look like an elderly pedant.

"Mind your own business!" Tao-ching smiled, showing teeth like ivory. "We're not all like you. When you see a man you fancy, you love him; when you see two, you love them both. You're an expert on love!"

"Well, well! Is that all the thanks I get for talking to you for your own good? Just think how queer he looks. What is there about him worth loving? Tell me, Tao-ching, what do you think of Old Lu? He's energetic, brave, capable and intelligent. Would you like me to act as your go-between?"

Tao-ching's heart missed a beat when Li-ping linked her name with that of the man she respected and loved so much. She blushed scarlet, her big eyes blank. With a ripple of laughter Li-ping hugged her and whispered into her ear:

"Why hesitate, child? Off with the old love, on with the new! Can you remember who said that? Honestly, that old pedant of yours doesn't deserve you. Be bold and make a fresh start!"

"No. He loves me. It would be cruel to leave him!" responded Tao-ching softly, shaking her head. She could not joke on this subject when her friend so obviously meant what she said.

"Are you waiting for Yu Yung-tse to erect a monument to your chastity?" demanded Li-ping gravely, though a mocking smile played round her mouth. "You talk of joining the revolution, yet dare not revolt over a trifle like this — for after all what do personal matters count?"

These casual remarks annoyed Tao-ching and, letting go of her friend's hand, she remained seated without saying a word, her head bent. She knew there was a rift between her and Yung-tse, which her pursuit of a new life was widening daily, and yet she pitied him. A deep sense of compassion bound her to him. Believing that no revolutionary should be over-concerned with his own personal problems, she had borne the heartache caused by such conflicting emotions, and had tried to swallow her discontent, hoping in this way to get along better with Yung-tse. But Pai Li-ping's reference to "trifles" opened her eyes to the fact that, far from making light of her personal problems, she was letting them overwhelm her — her indifference was nothing but a pose.

She stared blankly and thoughtfully out of the window at the blue sky, until Li-ping thought she must have taken offence, and embraced and coaxed her as if she were a child:

"There now, Tao-ching, don't be angry! If Old Yu is worthy of your love, go on loving him! Far be it from me to drive a wedge between you. Just let me remind you of one thing. . . ." She let go of Tao-ching's hand to stand up and solemnly say, "You know, don't you, that Hsiu-yu has gone to the Northeast to join the Anti-Japanese Volunteers? She wanted Hsu Ning to go with her since they were so much in love. But Hsu Ning — he's good at making high-sounding speeches but less effective when it comes to action — Hsu Ning refused to go. He couldn't bear to leave his mother alone or to give up his studies. Of course, I too am to blame for holding him back in one way or another. Still, I can't help admiring Hsiu-yu. She was studying too and in love, but she gave it all up for the revolution and left for the Northeast. Don't learn from Hsu Ning or me, Tao-ching. Better follow Hsiu-yu's example. By the way, I suppose you know she's a Korean."

"A Korean! . . ."

Tao-ching repeated these two words in amazement, and said no more.

She went back to her room feeling rather annoyed, and throwing herself on the bed was soon lost in thought.

Dusk fell and she still had not risen to prepare supper.

"Tao-ching, how lovely you are! Like crab-apple blossom or a beauty waking from a dream in spring. . . ." Yung-tse, who had slipped quietly into the room, was gazing at her graceful figure as she lay there.

Tao-ching, ignoring him, picked up a book and buried her face in it. He went up to her and took the book from her hand, pulling a face at the title, *Capital.*

"What problems is this great disciple of Karl Marx studying now?" he asked with a smile.

"Why must you make fun of me?" she cried, her glance resting on him for a moment with the conviction that the Yung-tse whom she had loved had turned into someone quite vulgar and loathsome. Torn between anger and despair, she retorted: "Anyway, a disciple of Karl Marx is far better than a disciple of Hu Shih!"

"What did you say?" It was Yung-tse's turn to be angry. "What's wrong with being a disciple of Hu Shih?"

"Oh, it's an admirable thing! He licks the boots of the ruling class and the imperialists, and helps Chiang Kai-shek to ride roughshod over the students. What's wrong with that?" Flinging her book on the bed, Tao-ching turned her back on him contemptuously.

Yung-tse leaned against the desk with his head in his hands, trying to restrain himself; but presently he raised his head and sneered:

"Revolution! Struggle! What high-sounding terms! I'd like to see any of these young ladies and gentlemen, who profess to be revolutionaries, go down a mine! No, it's much

pleasanter just to shout about the proletariat and the bourgeoisie!"

"How dare you!" Tao-ching sprang up looking at him with angry eyes. "I've had all I can stand from you. I'll count it a kindness if you'll let me go!"

At once the tension in the air melted away. As if he were at his last gasp, Yung-tse begged hoarsely:

"My darling! My life! Don't leave me!"

They were reconciled before retiring that night. Looking into Tao-ching's face, Yung-tse brightened and said:

"I came back this afternoon in high spirits, because I had a piece of good news for you. Unfortunately we fell out over nothing. Don't let's quarrel any more, dear. . . . But enough of that. Do you know that I'm assured of a job after graduation? Isn't that splendid news?"

"What job? You won't graduate for a couple of months yet."

"Yes, but it's better to plan well ahead. You know what competition there is for jobs nowadays." In a voice in which triumph mingled with the fear of giving offence, he continued softly, "Li Kuo-ying knows Hu Shih well — now, please don't be angry. It's not that I idealize Hu Shih, but I have our livelihood to think of. At my request, Li was good enough to show Hu Shih one of my papers on textual research. And, would you believe it, Dr. Hu was so pleased that he told Li to take me to see him! This morning I ventured to call. He encouraged me to study hard and gave me some tips on how to carry out research. Finally, he promised to find me a job when I have graduated." Taking her hand in a firm grasp, his small eyes gleaming with joy, Yung-tse concluded, "Darling, I've heard that any student he approves of is assured of a brilliant career, a promising future!"

"Hmm." Tao-ching bit her lips at the sight of his smug expression. "So you've really become a great disciple of Dr. Hu Shih!"

"Darling!" His hand over her mouth, in mock-serious tones he scolded, "You mustn't let yourself be obsessed by these revolutionary illusions. After all, facts are facts. Hu Shih's scholarship has been recognized ever since the May the Fourth Movement. How can he harm our young people? You've had a hard time for the past two years, by casting in your lot with me. I often feel I've let you down. Some of my friends have said, 'Old Yu, your wife is quite good-looking. Why don't you dress her up?' If I really get a good job after graduation, the first thing I mean to do is get you two velvet gowns and several silk ones, as well as a smart overcoat. What colour would you like, darling? I'd love to see you in buff or light green to set off your youth and distinction. Then everyone will see how marvellously lovely my Tao-ching is. . . ." He was so carried away that he pushed her under the light and stepped back to stare at her, as if seeing her for the first time. His head on one side and with narrowed eyes, he surveyed her complacently. "You're quite perfect, Tao-ching, except that your shoulders are the least bit too broad and your mouth a little too wide. The beauties of old times all had narrow shoulders and small mouths. Do you remember the verse: 'A mouth small and red as the cherry, a waist slender and pliant as the willow?' Don't tell me you're angry again! Why are you frowning? Come, let's go to bed now. You can slap me if you like, but don't sulk all the time!"

Tao-ching nearly lost her temper, for she could not stand being treated like a doll in this senseless way, but she was too exhausted to protest. She fell into an uneasy sleep, only to wake after a series of nightmares. In the dark she turned to look at the man beside her, hardly able to believe that she had once respected and loved him with all her heart. He had saved her, helped her, loved her — for selfish reasons. . . . In a flash, Pai Li-ping's words came back to her and she thought of Lu Chia-chuan . . . revolutionary . . . brave. "There's a real man for you!" She smiled to herself. The dark branches outside the window were swaying gently. "Does he know how much I admire him?" she wondered. A bitter-sweet sensation flooded her heart and she felt a keen happiness mingled with despair.

That night she had a strange dream.

Under the dark dome of the sky she was rowing a boat over the foam-capped, storm-swept sea. The wind and rain, the great waves and the louring clouds pitted themselves together against her small craft, and terror overcame her. She was utterly alone in this fearful ocean. Sheer billows fell on her like an avalanche; clouds pressed down on her like huge monsters; she shrieked and trembled. Her boat, buffeted to and fro, must surely sink the next instant into the depths. Pulling hard on the oars, she turned her head and saw a familiar figure in the bow, a man in a long gown who smiled calmly at her. In a frenzy of desperation, she swore: "Confound it! Are you going to let me drown?" Yet he went on sitting there calmly, and even took out his tobacco pouch. In a passion she dropped the oars and threw herself at him; but when she seized him by the throat, she found that he was a strong, handsome young man whose passionate eyes entranced her as he smiled. By the time she loosened her grip the storm had died down and the sea was blue once more. They sat silently face to face, gazing at each other. It was Lu Chia-chuan! In her amazement she dropped an oar and he plunged into the sea after it, but he was swallowed up by the waves. At once the sky became dark with clouds again. Weeping and calling out wildly, she threw herself into the water. . . .

She woke to find Yung-tse shaking her gently.

"What's the matter, Tao-ching? Why were you calling out? I couldn't sleep for thinking about my second dissertation. When it's finished I shall show it to Dr. Hu. It should help me to get a better job after the summer vacation."

In bewilderment, Tao-ching was recalling her dream. Turning over, she answered vaguely:

"Let's sleep. I'm so deadly tired."

But like Yung-tse she was so engrossed in her thoughts that she could not sleep all night.

Chapter 19

In a small study set in a little garden, soft sunlight filtered through a bamboo screen and dappled the cases filled with handsome books. Lo Ta-fang, just home from gaol, was lying on a couch of split bamboo, recounting his recent experiences to Lu Chia-chuan, who, seated on a swivel-chair in front of the desk, was listening in silence, his eyes fixed on his friend.

"The night I got back, I had a row with my father." Lo Ta-fang grinned, shaking big fists by way of illustration. "He tweaked his moustache and bleated at me with his northeastern twang: 'Fatty!' — don't laugh, that's my pet-name — 'I left no stone unturned to bail you out and enlisted the help of all my friends and spent a thousand silver dollars into the bargain. From now on you must keep out of trouble and apply yourself to your studies. I've a piece of good news for you: I'm going to send you to Japan to study or, if you prefer, to the United States. But before you go, don't you dare have any more to do with the Communists. If you get mixed up with those ruffians —' he whipped off his gold-rimmed spectacles to glare at me as if he meant to murder me. Guess what my answer was, Old Lu! I told him, 'Father, you're the loser of this bargain! I'm not worth a thousand silver dollars, nor the overwhelming kindness of your friends, much less do I deserve to be sent to America for a process of gilding. Rotten wood can't be carved, as the saying goes. You'd do better to send me back to gaol.' That threw him into such a rage, he swore I was an undutiful, unfilial son who had eyes but could not see because of Communist indoctrination, and sooner or later I'd end up on the guillotine. . . . I didn't lose my temper. I smiled nicely at him and said, 'It's too early to tell which of us is going to the dogs, father. . . .' He was so furious that he packed up and has gone to Lushan for the summer, taking my stepmother with him." He burst out laughing.

Lo Ta-fang had been transferred from the garrison headquarters to the lock-up of the district court, where he had been

detained for three months. Though his face was no longer as plump and ruddy as hitherto, this persecution had not left him downcast. His spirits were as high as ever. His big eyes sparkled and he shook his fists as he spoke.

"You really know a thing or two, kid." Laughing, Lu Chia-chuan sprang up and punched him on the shoulder — their usual demonstration of friendship. "So what are you going to do now? Stay at home like a young gentleman?"

"No, that's not in my line!" Leaning against a glass cabinet of books, Lo Ta-fang smiled and shook his head. "My old man's rising higher and higher in the official world. He's off to Nanking soon to head some department in the Administrative Yuan. I've made up my mind to break with my family for good, and I shan't be able to go on studying in Peiping. Old Lu, I sincerely hope the Party will trust me and put me to the test by sending me to where the fight is fiercest."

Stern resolution had replaced the smile on his face, as he kept his eyes quietly and steadily on Lu Chia-chuan.

The latter was pacing the polished floor deep in thought, only glancing occasionally at his friend.

Outside, the freshly-watered garden paths were lined with pomegranates and oleanders in full bloom, and their heady perfume drifted in on the breeze through the screened windows. In the sultry weather, the small garden of this grand house seemed particularly cool, quiet and well kept. Lu Chia-chuan, in a light foreign suit with his hair well-groomed, looked more like the master of the house than tousled Lo Ta-fang, in his shabby cotton shirt. After thinking the matter over for some time, he reached a decision and raised his head to say firmly:

"Old Lo, this is where you stand, you can't stay in Peiping any longer. Now the North Chahar Anti-Japanese Allied Army is putting up a brave fight against the invaders. We have been sending men to join that army. What about you? Are you ready to go?"

"Fine!" Lo Ta-fang got hold of him as if to prevent his escape. "My hearty thanks, comrade! Please urge the Party to fix this up quickly."

The big beads of sweat on Lo Ta-fang's forehead made him look like a long-distance runner, flushed and perspiring, but exultant at having won a race. He had given his whole heart to the cause of communism, and his only fear, on his release, was that the prison bars might have cut him off from the Party. Now that Lu Chia-chuan had convinced him that all was well, he was too overjoyed to crack any more jokes. He asked about the position of the North Chahar Anti-Japanese Allied Army, and they started discussing the military situation.

In May 1933, the "Tangku Agreement" between the Kuomintang and the Japanese invaders had betrayed China's sovereignty and aroused such indignation throughout the country that the people united more closely and threw themselves more vigorously into action. On May 26, the North Chahar Anti-Japanese Allied Army — a force organized by the people — was set up in Changchiakou. Led by Chi Hung-chang, a member of the Communist Party, and the anti-Japanese generals Feng Yu-hsiang and Fang Chen-wu, in addition to part of the Northeastern Anti-Japanese Volunteers and local armed units, this army included a contingent of students from North China. More and more patriotic intellectuals were responding to the call of the Communist Party and marching eagerly to the battlefields outside the Great Wall to save their country from ruin.

Presently Lu Chia-chuan remarked:

"Hsu Ning said he wanted to go to North Chahar too, but he's still wavering. Since coming back from the Nanking demonstration, he's joined in some action but hasn't turned up on other occasions. He's a typical petty-bourgeois revolutionary who wants to join the revolution but is afraid of the hardships and danger involved."

"Isn't Pai Li-ping exactly the same? I say . . . have they grown closer, Old Lu, since I was arrested?" A shadow crossed Lo Ta-fang's face.

"For a while they were very thick, yes. Hsu Ning may

have been influenced by Pai Li-ping. But now that she's gone to Shanghai, he should improve if we give him enough help."

"Let me have a try." After a pause Lo Ta-fang grinned broadly. "Won't you give me this job?"

"You really want it?" Lu Chia-chuan stared in mild surprise, leaning over the desk. "Well, that's fine! Sure this won't affect your morale?"

Lo Ta-fang bounded noiselessly over to pound him on the shoulder. "What do you take me for? Love — how can love compare with our revolutionary cause?"

Lu Chia-chuan said nothing, for he had a sudden vision of Yu Yung-tse's small eyes burning with jealousy and Tao-ching's pale sad face. . . . He had wanted to see more of her and give her more help, but had not called for a long time, unwilling to come between her and her husband. Getting the better of his own feelings, he had managed to keep contact with her down to the minimum.

Lo Ta-fang was sitting now in the leather-upholstered swivel-chair in front of the desk, and from one of its drawers he took a gold watch which he opened and set about repairing. When Lu Chia-chuan remained standing there in silence, Lo raised his head to ask:

"What's on your mind?"

The other did not seem to have heard. Lost in thought, he stared out of the window at a small clump of bamboos. After a while he muttered under his breath, "It's been ages since I saw her. . . ."

"Is she — Lin Tao-ching — the cause of all your troubles?" Though careless and inattentive in some matters, Lo Ta-fang was by no means lacking in perception. He looked up from the watch he was mending to remark, "Seems to me you're in love with her — why not tell her so, plainly?"

Lu Chia-chuan lay down on the bamboo couch again, his hands behind his head, and after an interval retorted:

"Don't talk rot! Don't you know she has a husband?"

"Yu Yung-tse? Never mind him! They're too badly matched to stay together long. No, Old Lu, you're not playing your cards properly."

"I don't want to make trouble for anyone else. Such a thing never crossed my mind. . . . That's why I've been seeing as little of her as possible."

Putting down the watch, Lo Ta-fang turned to look gravely at his friend, saying gently and frankly:

"Why make things so hard for yourself? I can't see that this has anything to do with moral issues. Even if you don't love her, she can't stay with someone like Yu Yung-tse for long."

"You're talking rubbish again. You just don't understand," replied Lu Chia-chuan in a low voice, his eyes shut. "They are deeply attached to each other. . . . Besides, . . . Well, I don't want to come between them."

"If you don't destroy the old, how can you build up the new? Are you going to let this girl be ruined by Yu Yung-tse? You should strike like lightning to smash what is dead or dying. Don't behave like a disciple of Confucius!"

Lu Chia-chuan opened his eyes and grinned.

"Things are not as simple as all that. . . . Well, enough of this; it's getting us nowhere." He closed his eyes again and said no more.

Lo Ta-fang returned to the desk to continue with his repair work, glancing from time to time at his friend's sad face. He could find no suitable topic to break the silence.

"Old Lu, you've pawned your watch, haven't you?" he asked presently. "It was a very old one anyway. Yesterday I happened to find this gold watch in one of my father's drawers. It's a good make but obviously, since he left it there, he doesn't think it good enough for him. I'm trying to fix it so that you can use it." Seeing that his friend remained silent, he continued, "Remember the advice you gave me in connection with Pai Li-ping, Old Lu? You said, 'Love isn't everything.' Now I'm going to give you the same advice. A tough Bolshevik like you shouldn't start getting lovesick! . . ."

"Get away with you! Who wants your advice?" Lu Chia-chuan sprang up, rubbing his eyes and shaking off his depression. "You needn't worry about me," he said with a grin. "After all, what does it matter. . . . Now, Old Lo, let's have a song. I remember how well you sing the *Marseillaise.* Go ahead!"

"No, neither of us is in the mood to sing."

Instead, they began to talk of everything under the sun. Lu Chia-chuan took off his jacket because he was hot and discovered two large holes in his shirt sleeves. Turning to his friend with a wink he asked:

"May I have a bath here? This suit, given me by a friend, looks smart enough, but my shirt, pants and socks are worn out. Can you let me have a change of clothes?"

"Certainly!" Lo Ta-fang pressed a bell, which summoned the housekeeper from the inner court. A plump woman of over forty with waved hair, she looked neat and capable in her white apron. Before she entered, Lu Chia-chuan had put on his jacket to hide his torn shirt.

The housekeeper brought in a tray with a pot of tea and some refreshments. As she put them on a table, Lo Ta-fang turned to her solemnly and said:

"Thanks, aunty. Just leave them there. Let me introduce you. This is Mr. Wu, one of my father's students. He's just come back from studying in the United States and will soon take up the high post of a department head in Peiping."

The woman promptly nodded and asked with a respectful smile, "Have you been here long, Mr. Wu? It's very hot, isn't it?"

Suppressing his inclination to laugh, Lu Chia-chuan nodded back, darting a quick look at his friend who had entered so thoroughly into this play-acting.

"It's very hot, aunty, and Mr. Wu has caught a chill. I've asked him to have a comfortable bath here. Will you get everything ready, please, and bring some of the master's best shirts, underclothes and socks so that Mr. Wu can change. He was used to the best in America, so bring the finest quality you can find." Noting the deference she was showing, he concluded, "Mr. Wu is my father's favourite student; you'll have to treat him well!"

Assenting volubly, the housekeeper withdrew.

When she was out of hearing, the two young men burst out laughing. Wiping the tears of mirth from his eyes, Lu Chia-chuan shook his fist and cried:

"You rascal! Where did you learn all these tricks?"

Lo Ta-fang grinned. "By the time my old man comes back, I shall be gone. He can sputter and swear and call me an ungrateful son, a swindler, a worthless Red bandit or anything else he likes! You mustn't underestimate this amah. My parents trust her implicitly. They've told her to keep an eye on me, so I had to do something to make her jump."

When they had finished tea, Lo Ta-fang lifted a handsome gramophone down from a shelf and said, "Let's have some music before your bath." He put on a record, and the room was filled with a soft, sentimental voice:

Believe me, dear,
I'm true!
To you,
Only to you!

"What utter rubbish!" Lo Ta-fang took off the record and threw it on the floor, smashing it to pieces. After looking through a whole pile of records he declared, "No use! It's all American jazz. Well, let's listen to Jeanette MacDonald."

They listened, smiling, to a song from *The Love Parade*, while Lo Ta-fang nodded his head in time to the music. When it ended, he said:

"If only we could play the *Internationale* as loudly as we want, or the songs about our worker and peasant fighters! Well, the day will come!"

Chapter 20

Late one night Hsu Ning and Lo Ta-fang were strolling beside the wall that enclosed the Peking University grounds.

They talked as they went, Lo Ta-fang's strong arm around Hsu Ning, whose handsome face was gleaming with excitement in the moonlight. Lo Ta-fang was not in his usual jesting vein, but seemed to be a sober, matter-of-fact elder brother trying patiently to convince a stubborn, irresponsible younger boy. The summer night was so far advanced that the lovers and friends who had been sauntering along in twos and threes had now disappeared, yet the two young men went on talking as eagerly as ever.

"Count me in, Old Lo. I'll come with you. I can win my mother round. I know what's right. . . ."

"Good for you, Hsu Ning! I believe you. . . . I don't know how you feel, but whenever I think of the glorious life at the front, I wish I had wings to fly straight out beyond the Great Wall! You know the saying: 'A brave man is ready to die on the battlefield and to be carried home wrapped in a horse's hide.' Yes, the time has come for action." Lo Ta-fang ran his eyes over the broad, deserted university grounds, where the Red Building loomed like a huge screen before the night sky. Carried away by his ardour, he gripped Hsu Ning's hand tightly.

Hsu Ning, too, was moved by his friend's enthusiasm. Looking hard into that broad, kindly face, he was struck by something sublime in Lo Ta-fang. He recalled his friend's heroism that night at the Ming Tombs Barracks in Nanking, his devotion to his work in the university, and his resolute rejection of the comforts of a bourgeois home. Above all he was struck by the broad-minded freedom from jealousy which made Lo Ta-fang treat the very person who had stolen his sweetheart away as a brother. Hsu Ning gazed at him for some time, torn between admiration and shame, then muttered in an agitated voice:

"I must go and convince my mother — I don't know how to thank you, Old Lo!"

"My dear friend, how splendid it will be if we can fight shoulder to shoulder!"

After this conversation, Hsu Ning did do his best to convince his mother and himself as well. But as she had been left a widow early in life and he was her only son, it was hard to persuade her to let him leave for the front. Right up to the day before his friends' departure, he was not sure whether he would go with them or not.

At dusk he went home to see his mother.

He was downcast and ill at ease. This was his last chance — he must make a final effort to win her over.

She was sitting listlessly on a stool, darning stockings. Without giving her son a chance to open his mouth, she began to complain. Her snow-white hair was quivering and the hand that held a needle trembled.

"Don't say any more, child, about going away. Why can't I die and be done with this misery? When you were three, your father died, leaving you to carry on the family line. For your sake I've struggled to live on for twenty-three years, watching over you and contriving to bring you up. Now you want to go so far away? No, you shall not go!" Tears began to flow down her cheeks and, raising a corner of her jacket to wipe them away, she hurried on before he could interrupt: "You're big and tall now, but when you were a child you were ailing most of the time. Every month there were twenty nights or more when I had to watch by your bed and couldn't sleep. You don't know how many times I kowtowed to Buddha, or the amount of incense I burned for your sake. Once your illness took such a bad turn that everyone gave you up for lost and in my despair I swallowed some opium. . . ."

Hsu Ning could stand no more. With a wave of his hand he cut short her laments.

"I've heard all this a hundred times, mother! I can't listen to any more. Why must you always complain? After all, I haven't forgotten what I owe you. . . . But the thing is, mother, at a time when our country is in such deadly peril, a young man can't just sit at home doing nothing. . . . And it's not as if I'd be in any danger either. A great many of my fellow students have gone, and they all write back saying that things are fine up there. . . ."

Too frantic to wipe her tears, his mother broke in:

"You're just wasting your breath, son. I'm not going to let you go! If you do, I'll . . . I'll kill myself." Throwing back her head to fix her gaze on him, she cried in anguish, "China has so many people — she doesn't need you!"

Hsu Ning realized that it was useless to say more. He sprang sullenly to his feet and made for the door, but after a couple of steps he turned back to say curtly:

"Mother, don't cry any more! Will you be happy if I don't go? Humph, if I really wanted to go, you couldn't stop me. What a mess! I should never have asked your advice. . . ."

He hurried off alone to Peihai Park and spent the evening pacing up and down its hills. A sultry breeze rustled the pines, and the sound grated on his ears. Few visitors were about. Staring blankly at the host of stars that studded the misty grey sky, he saw in his mind's eye the slender youthful figure of Tsui Hsiu-yu — was she in the Changpai Mountains or in the great forests of Heilungkiang? . . . This girl, whom he had done his best to forget, had taken possession of his soul in the past few days, filling him with disgust at himself and with remorse for his conduct.

She must have forgotten him, a coward like him. . . . He dug his fingers into his temples and seemed to hear Lo Ta-fang's voice ringing in his ears, "Dear friend, how splendid it will be if we can fight shoulder to shoulder!" Feeling a choking sensation, he tore open his shirt and sank down, his head in his hands.

Hsu Ning's father, a petty official, had died young and his mother had never remarried, but contrived with the small property she inherited to bring up her son and send him to college. All his life Hsu Ning had been accustomed to the warm, cosy atmosphere of a petty-bourgeois family, and his mother's over-indulgence had made him soft. Consequently, though this healthy and handsome boy had been drawn to the revolution and eagerly taken part in revolutionary activities after reading Marxist theories and making friends with people like Lu Chia-chuan, at decisive moments, when he was required to sacrifice something in order to advance, he gave way like a sapling unable to withstand a tempest.

When Tsui Hsiu-yu joined the Northeastern Anti-Japanese Volunteers to defend her home and her second motherland, she had expected Hsu Ning to go with her. But her sweetheart was unwilling to give up his studies, for he would be graduating in two years' time; and he had his mother to look after. In addition, although he had never voiced this feeling, the Northeast to him was a strange, desolate place as compared with his native province of Kiangsu. Over and above all this was the attraction of Pai Li-ping. . . . So, in the end, Hsiu-yu set out on her journey with some other courageous students, leaving Hsu Ning at home to continue his studies and look after his mother. Later on, when the White terror tightened its grip, he did not even dare take part in revolutionary activities. Now the North Chahar Anti-Japanese Allied Army had launched a heroic struggle against the enemy and, inspired by Lu Chia-chuan and Lo Ta-fang and determined to make amends for his past mistakes, Hsu Ning had tried repeatedly, but to no purpose, to get his mother's permission to go. Losing heart, he had given up the attempt altogether. This meant that when the movement to join the army was in full swing among his fellow students, he felt wretchedly undecided. In the end, the comforts of a peaceful life at home made him determine not to join up. Nevertheless as he ran down the hill his legs were trembling, and his eyes moist with tears of shame.

In order to escape the attention of the Kuomintang and keep out of harm's way, the student volunteers boarded the northbound train at a small station outside the West Gate. Hsu Ning had intended to see them off, but an overwhelming sense of shame made him turn back half way. He spent the day on his bed in the hostel, slinking home in the evening to make sure that all was well with his mother. When he raised the bamboo door curtain, he found her kneeling before a Buddhist image.

"Bodhisattva! Goddess of Mercy!" she was praying. "Keep my son from harm and evil, I beg of you! Don't let him go away. Make him change his mind and stay by his mother's side, just as in those happy days when he was a child. . . ."

Hsu Ning chuckled and his mother, turning around with a start, was overjoyed to see him on the threshold as if in answer to her prayers. She rose quickly to her feet and caught hold of his arm. Beside herself with joy, she murmured:

"So you didn't go after all, child! Well, this is Heaven's will. Let me give thanks to the Goddess of Mercy!" Once again she prostrated herself before the image. "Great Goddess of Mercy! Accept the gratitude of your humble handmaid for protecting her son. She will abstain from meat and chant scriptures every day. . . ."

Hsu Ning cut in with a bitter smile:

"Enough of this mumbo-jumbo, mother! Won't you get supper ready? I'm hungry."

Happy in spite of his caustic remarks, she set about preparing a delicious meal, stealing glances from time to time at her son as he lay on the bed, as if afraid her darling might fly away.

During supper she asked without warning:

"Your friends who have left for the front have homes, haven't they?"

"Of course. Everybody has parents."

"How could their mothers bear to let them go? I can't understand it." She stopped eating, the bowl in her hands, and looked at him wistfully.

"Other mothers aren't like you!" he rejoined indignantly. "They know it's their duty to love the country, and they want to be real mothers. . . . After all, if the enemy comes that will be the end of everything — children, homes and all."

She said nothing but shook her head and with a heavy sigh went to wash up. After supper, Hsu Ning read for a while and then, paying no further attention to his mother, went listlessly to bed. Towards midnight he was awakened by the sound of a voice and, straining his ears, heard her chanting prayers again.

"Bodhisattva! Goddess of Mercy! Protect those young people who have gone to fight the Japanese. Let no harm be-fall them! Bring them home soon, safe and sound. Forgive me, Goddess, I can't bear to part with my son! . . ."

Hsu Ning laughed to himself. "So that's how she feels!" He was going to call out when a sudden furious pounding on the door startled them both. The next instant police and gendarmes rushed into the house, which was soon crammed with vicious-looking men armed with pistols and rifles. Hsu Ning's mother clung in terror to her son, who stood beside the door dumbfounded. A fat plain-clothes man in a tall hat turned to ask him:

"Are you Hsu Ning?"

"Yes!" Taking a grip on himself, Hsu Ning nodded.

His mother clung even more desperately to his arm, nearly frightened out of her senses.

The police and gendarmes began to ransack the place, rummaging through trunks and cupboards without finding anything. Then one of them turned to the fat man, shaking his head and winking to ask for instructions. The fat man's gold teeth flashed in a sinister smile.

"Any luck? Let me try!"

He thrust his hand into the drawer of a desk and produced a copy of *Red Banner of Northern China.* "What's this?" he cried jubilantly. "No doubt about it — he's a Red!"

Knowing that the capture of a Communist would fetch them a five-hundred-yuan reward, the special-service man had planted this magazine there in order to bring a false charge against Hsu Ning.

"Here's the evidence!" the others bleated. "He's a Communist, all right, confound him!"

"Take him along!"

Seeing that these thugs with guns had laid hands on her son and were dragging him away, his mother cried out brokenheartedly and would not let go of his arm. "Why are you taking him away? What crime has he committed?" In a frenzy, she butted the policemen with her head. In that moment of tension and confusion, a sobering thought flashed through Hsu Ning's mind:

"If I'd had the guts to go with my comrades today, all this would never have happened!"

Disgust at his own cowardice lent him courage. He freed himself violently from his mother's grip and told her sternly:

"Mother, let go! We ought both to be sorry for what we've done!"

Then, deaf to her bitter cries, he stood erect, waiting for the gendarmes to put heavy handcuffs on him.

Chapter 21

Yung-tse went out after supper one evening, leaving Tao-ching to clear the table and wash up. The landlady turned on her radio, and a popular sentimental song assailed Tao-ching's ears.

A gentle rain
Is falling still;
The sky is dark,
The wind is chill. . . .

Listlessly, Tao-ching cleared the supper table. The more sentimental the music, the louder the landlady and her husband seemed to like it. She sighed and was about to sit down when she felt a tap on her shoulder. Turning round, she found it was Lu Chia-chuan, whom she had not seen for months. Excitedly flinging the dish-cloth aside, she flushed and cried breathlessly:

"Brother Lu! It's ages since I saw you! Where have you been all this time? . . ."

They had not met since May Day. In the meantime Pai Li-ping had gone to Shanghai, and though Hsu Ning still dropped in occasionally, he was always in a hurry. Once more Tao-ching's life had become a mere dull round of household duties. Her large eyes, once cheerful and sparkling, had lost their lustre and, having again fallen prey to despair and perplexity, she no longer sang about the house. This unexpected visit made her happy and excited.

"Forgive me for not having called before — during the last few months I've been busier than usual," said Lu Chia-chuan. He put his brief-case on a table and sat down; but rose the next instant and asked, "How have you been, Tao-ching? Feeling depressed again?"

"Yes, I am!" Tao-ching lowered her head to wipe away a tear. "My life is like a stagnant pool — nothing disturbs it but quarrels and interminable reading. . . . Brother Lu, tell me what to do!" With upturned face, lips trembling, she looked at him seriously. "I've been expecting you — expecting the Party — to rescue me. . . ."

After glancing casually round the room and the courtyard, Lu Chia-chuan took his seat beside the table and smiled.

"I know how you feel, Tao-ching. But don't lose heart. We'll do our best to help you. . . ." His voice was grave, his eyes as calm and kind as ever. "The White terror is becoming more and more deadly. The Third Regiment of Military Police led by Chiang Hsiao-hsien is arresting young patriots everywhere in Peiping. Did you know that Hsu Ning has been arrested?"

"No! Not Hsu Ning?" Tao-ching was horrified. "When did they take him?"

"He was arrested the same evening that Lo Ta-fang and some other students left for north Chahar to join the army. Hsu Ning meant to go too, but he kept putting it off and he was arrested. We're living in cruel times, Tao-ching, and the struggle is sharpening. Do you ever think of these things?"

"More often than I can say." Tao-ching blushed and leaned over the desk. "I'm not afraid of anything, not even death! To me it has always seemed better to die a heroic death than to lead a vain, humdrum life!"

As Lu Chia-chuan's keen eyes searched her pretty face, flushed with excitement and full of naivety, he felt he could have complete confidence in this girl whose life was so fraught with contradictions. After a pause, looking into her eyes, he asked, "Do you still want to die a heroic death on the battlefield?" He then chuckled. "That's wrong, Tao-ching! We join the revolution not in order to die but to live — to live a more worthwhile life and to bring happiness to millions upon millions of the oppressed. Why think of death before you have done anything worthwhile? That's a mistaken notion."

"Well then, Brother Lu, show me how to join the revolution! There's nothing revolutionary about my life now."

"All right, if that's what you really want, I'll ask your help now." He suddenly grew grave. "There are three things I want you to do. Please think them over and see if you can help. First, I have some papers which I'd like to leave in safe-keeping here for a couple of days. Secondly, I want you to deliver a message for me tonight. Thirdly. . . ." He paused to glance at her thoughtfully. "Thirdly, I should like to stay here for a while — if possible, overnight. Agents have been after me for the last few days — I had to dodge one of them to come in here."

Tao-ching's pleasure in this assignment was mixed with anxiety for Lu Chia-chuan. He had been talking so lightheartedly about her daily life and outlook that no idea of his danger had arisen in her mind. She stared, amazed by his coolness and cheerfulness, and after a moment said frankly, "I'll do whatever you want, Brother Lu. I've been wishing you would treat me as one of yourselves. Of course, you can stay here — that will be all right, I'll just go and tell Yung-tse." The mention of this name made her blush.

Lu Chia-chuan was inclining forward with one foot on a stool and one hand to his forehead. His handsome, dependable face was grave and his brows were knitted in thought. After a moment's silence, he shook his head and tapped the table.

"No, you'd better not tell Old Yu, Tao-ching. It won't do for me to spend the night here. . . . Suppose we arrange it this way: I have some writing to do and I'd like to stay here a little longer. Can you ask Old Yu to come home rather later than usual?" He handed his brief-case to her. "There are some secret propaganda leaflets here. Put them in a safe place, and mind you don't let Old Yu see them."

"All right!" Tao-ching carefully took the worn brown case into her arms. Her heart was flooded with joy so powerful and inspiring that it dispelled the anxiety that had gripped her. Hugging the brief-case, she looked at him with glowing eyes. "Brother Lu, do spend the night here! If you don't want to see Old Yu, he and I can put up somewhere else and you can have the place to yourself. I promise to. . . ." She wanted to promise to keep him safe from harm, but the words remained unspoken. How could she, young and childish as she was, use words framed for a mother's lips, to a man she looked up to as her teacher?

"There's no need!" Tao-ching's obvious anxiety brought a contented smile to his face. "I want you to call on someone, Tao-ching," he said. "As she lives in a rather out-of-the-way place, quite a distance from here, you had better start at once. She's known as Sister Li. Just ask her, 'Have Little Tai and Little Wu come back from the cinema yet?' Then say, 'Young Feng is doing very well.' If she says they're back, that's fine. If you can't find her and someone asks what you want, say you are looking for a relative or that you must have come to the wrong number. Just do what seems best. Keep your wits about you, and keep cool. . . ." He then gave her some advice about underground work, patiently explaining all the essential details.

"Little Tai and Little Wu who went to the cinema — what does that mean?" Tao-ching's eyes were wide with wonder.

"What you don't need to know, don't ask — that's one of our rules," he answered kindly but firmly.

Tao-ching nodded and stood twisting the edge of her jacket. Although she was confused and anxious, this new element of mystery made her mission seem exciting. She had much to ask, yet could not bring herself to speak.

They faced each other in silence.

Not wanting to be late, she rose to go, nodding to Lu Chia-chuan as she made for the door. She suddenly thought that vicious spies might be lying in wait for him outside. Perhaps he would be taken the moment she left. Fear rooted her to the ground and she leaned limply against the door, watching him blankly, unable to express her reluctance to leave and her righteous indignation on his behalf.

"It's half past eight, Tao-ching. You'd better go!" He had not taken his eyes off her all this time.

"All right, Brother Lu, I'm off! Wait for me here!" Biting her lips, she turned to go. But before she had crossed the threshold he called to her:

"Don't look so flustered and in such a hurry. Keep calm! Nervousness may spoil everything. I'll wait here for you as long as I can. If you don't find me here when you come back, you needn't worry. I'll call back again in three days for my things."

"You must wait for me! Don't go away. . . ." Tao-ching ran back to him and took his hand, her long lashes were glistening with tears.

Lu Chia-chuan's feelings were extraordinarily complex at that moment. The girl's ardent aspirations and her admiration for him, which she sometimes failed to conceal, stirred him so deeply that he longed to open his heart to her. But that was out of the question. He must exercise self-control. With her hands in his, he spoke to her like a brother, affectionately and solemnly:

"Tao-ching, you've never been through a bitter struggle and don't yet realize its seriousness and complexity. . . . Suppose after three days I haven't turned up. . . ." He opened wide his shining, kindly eyes. ". . . Then you had better burn the things I've left here. In the future — in the future, so long as you have faith in our cause and can fight for the good, happy days that lie ahead, I know you will reach your goal and your dream will come true. Never forget that, Tao-ching. Communism can never be wiped out. They will never succeed in killing all our comrades — we are legion! I expect we shall meet again. . . ."

Tao-ching pulled herself together and gazed at him, so that she could grasp every word he said. To her, his speech was golden. It went straight to her heart. When she caught the significance of his final words, she was dumbfounded and tears streamed from her eyes. She wished desperately that she had some good hiding-place where she could lock him safely away from the reactionaries who sought to arrest him. But where was such a refuge to be found? She stood there lost in thought, then remembered that it was time to be going — she mustn't wait to be reminded again. So with unwilling steps she started to leave, but Lu Chia-chuan took her arm and gave her one last warning:

"Remember all I've told you, Tao-ching. You must give Sister Li my message word for word, and be careful on the road. If anyone follows you, don't come back straight away.... One more thing! Please ask Old Yu not to come home too early!"

"I'll do all you say. Don't worry!" Tao-ching walked out and vanished into the dusk.

Lu Chia-chuan leaned against the door-frame looking at the quiet courtyard with a smile, as if she were still standing there.

Tao-ching went straight to Li Kuo-ying's room in the East Hostel, where she found Yung-tse. She beckoned to him to come out and whispered earnestly:

"I have to go out on business tonight. Do you mind not going home until later?"

Yung-tse's suspicious eyes narrowed. "What's the matter? Why should I stay out if I don't want to? What difference will it make if I wait for you at home?"

Tao-ching was in a quandary and decided not to keep anything from him, especially as there was nothing to be ashamed of. So she quietly confided, "Yung-tse, spies are after Lu Chia-chuan, he has just taken refuge in our rooms. Don't go home until later than usual. Will you do as I ask? I am going on an errand for him now."

Yung-tse stood as motionless as a clay image, thinking, "On this beautiful summer night, perfumed with flowers, she must..... That's why she doesn't want her husband to go home. . . ." He cast a sidelong glance at Tao-ching and hissed:

"So your boy friend is waiting for you! But it happens to be my home, and I shall go back whenever I please!" He turned and strode back into Li's room, banging the door behind him.

Tao-ching was thoroughly wretched and indignant. For a few seconds she stood in the dim corridor as if rooted to the ground. Her instinct was to rush in and talk Yung-tse round, but the thought of Lu Chia-chuan made her calmer. She clenched her teeth and tossed her head, her face setting in determined lines. "No, I'd better go. It's no use arguing with him."

Two hours before calling on Tao-ching, Lu Chia-chuan had gone with Tai Yu and some others to a cinema in the east city. Just before the film started, Tai Yu and some of his comrades closed the door of the theatre and Lu Chia-chuan, as previously arranged, jumped on to the stage and began to speak on communism, the victories of the Red Army, and the need to resist Japan and save the country. Meanwhile the others distributed leaflets. The audience was thrown into confusion. Naturally, before Lu Chia-chuan reached the end of his speech the place was surrounded by police and soldiers. With great presence of mind, he took off his hat, put on another garment he had brought with him and left with the crowd. He had sent Tao-ching to their headquarters to find out what had happened to his friends.

But he was a marked man. The secret police had him under close observation and he was being shadowed by several men. Fortunately he had managed to shake off the agents on his way to Tao-ching's home. He knew he would be safe there because she was living with Yung-tse, whom no one could suspect of communist sympathies. He realized, of course, that Yung-tse would not want him to stay, but the situation was critical and he dared not show himself outside for the time being. His urgent need for a temporary hiding-place outweighed all other considerations.

Though he had just been through a fierce struggle and had eaten nothing all day, Lu Chia-chuan sat quietly down at Yung-tse's desk to write an urgent memorandum. As he was trying to concentrate, his mouth watered several times at the sight of some white steamed rolls in Tao-ching's small larder, but he had no time to eat. His task was urgent, and he didn't want Yung-tse to arrive before he had finished.

Lu Chia-chuan was writing when the door opened and in burst Yung-tse, a pile of old Chinese books under one arm. He turned livid with uncontrollable anger when he saw the visitor seated in that calm proprietary manner at his desk. His small eyes glared at Lu Chia-chuan as if he were a stranger who had intruded into his home, but he held back the angry curses on the tip of his tongue as he felt it would be unseemly and undignified to shout abuse. Before he could think of a dignified and cutting reproach, Lu Chia-chuan smiled and nodded to him.

"So you're back, Old Yu! I haven't seen you for months." Coolly folding the paper on which he had been writing, he rose and looked directly at Yung-tse.

Yung-tse, doing his best to suppress his rage asked coldly:

"What are you doing in my house?"

"Tao-ching asked me to wait for her here."

"Asked you to wait for her?" This reply goaded Yung-tse to still greater fury. He glared, smouldering with anger, but refrained from upbraiding him. He just whirled around, turned his back on him and said hoarsely:

"Lu Chia-chuan! Please stop trying to bewitch Tao-ching with those great Marxist principles of yours! I'd have you remember she's my wife! No one's going to use underhand means to destroy our happiness!"

Lu Chia-chuan looked quietly at Yung-tse's bony, stooping shoulders — in his agitation he had not even troubled to take off his hat and the shadow of his head on the wall was like a large black mushroom, his lanky body representing the stalk.

"Aren't you ashamed to talk like that, Old Yu?" he gravely said as he watched Yung-tse steadily. "Don't forget that besides being Tao-ching's husband, you're a university student who once loudly professed his patriotism. If your happiness has been destroyed, you've only yourself to blame." With these words he calmly opened the door, cast one last look at Yung-tse who was still facing the wall, and strode away.

When he had gone, Yung-tse dropped, as if stupefied, into the seat by the desk just vacated by Lu Chia-chuan, and buried his head in his arms. Despair had driven all his anger away. When he raised his head again, the electric light, dim at this time of night, made his long face appear more haggard and gaunt than ever.

"Women are the root of all evil. . . ." He took out a handkerchief and wiped the tears streaming down his cheeks.

Having found Sister Li without any difficulty and given her Lu Chia-chuan's message, Tao-ching took a ricksha home. She was excited and pleased to have carried out her mission, but presently she was filled with foreboding about the danger threatening her friend and felt indescribably uneasy. As she sat in the ricksha, her thoughts wandered, and it was not until she approached the entrance to their lane that she recalled his warning that she should see if anyone was following her. Reproaching herself for her carelessness, she looked in all directions. Reassured, on seeing that the dark road was deserted, she alighted and made a detour back to their lodgings, her heart filled with misgivings.

It was midnight and the room was pitch dark. As she entered, she switched on the light with trembling fingers. There was no sign of Lu Chia-chuan, and Yung-tse, who was lying in bed with his face to the wall, turned to stare at her but did not speak. Not stopping to consider what sort of mood he was in, she demanded hastily:

"When did you come back? Where is Lu Chia-chuan?"

"How should I know? It's not my job to look after your honourable friend!"

"You ought to feel ashamed of yourself, Yung-tse! If Lu Chia-chuan is arrested tonight, I shall think it was you who betrayed him!" Tao-ching made this remark quite spontaneously, not realizing what had prompted it, and stared at him as if he were an enemy.

Yung-tse sat up abruptly, sure that he had a genuine grievance this time. He made no attempt to plead with her but with a cold smile sneered:

"I've not come to that yet. But if someone steals my wife from me, I might."

Both their faces were as pale as the dim lamplight.

After a moment's silence, Tao-ching, reflecting that she must find out Lu Chia-chuan's whereabouts at all costs, calmed down a little, suppressed her anger, and in a gentler tone said:

"Yung-tse, don't let's misunderstand each other! No one's going to steal your wife. The situation is desperate — do tell me where he's gone!"

"He left as soon as I got home — at ten." Yung-tse shook his head with a bitter smile. "How could he stand the company of someone as backward as I am? Naturally the moment he saw me, he went away. Don't worry! I still have too tender a conscience to inform against anyone."

Tao-ching's mind was in confusion — she did not know whether to be glad or sorry. She was relieved that Lu Chia-chuan had not been arrested in her home, but the fact that she had failed to keep him overnight meant that she would be responsible if he was arrested after leaving. Deep in thought, and with bent head, she sat there for some time. Then feeling that the room was as stuffy as her heart was heavy, she went into the courtyard and stood under a jujube tree, gazing up at the starry sky. The painful thought that her task was uncompleted brought a flush to her cheeks and her heart burned with mortification.

"Tao-ching, aren't you ever coming to bed? Are you going to stand out there all night?" Yung-tse called from the room. Apparently he was waiting for her, and also could not sleep. But she paid no attention as she stood there, now watching the dark horizon. After a long, long while, she heaved a sigh and seemed to wake up.

"I'm just a bundle of nerves," she told herself. "It can wait! After all, three days will go very quickly."

Chapter 22

Leaving the cinema in a hurry, Tai Yu turned into a narrow lane — and was seized by secret-service agents who were lying in wait for him.

He was taken in a closely curtained car to a forbidding looking compound. His captors then led him through two courtyards into an unexpectedly handsome room, where a young man in a Western suit directed him to a seat on the sofa and then withdrew. Tai Yu, now alone in the room, scrutinized every corner despite his uneasiness. Strange! The place bore no resemblance to a prison or inquisition chamber. . . . It was obviously the study-*cum*-sitting-room of a wealthy family. Pale green silk curtains hung at the large windows; books filled the glass-door bookcases lining the wall. An antique porcelain vase, with immortelles in it, stood on a table in the centre of the room, surrounded by bottles of choice wines and spirits — Maotai, white wine and brandy. Tai Yu was particularly struck by the number of comfortable sofas and armchairs, and the scrolls of calligraphy and painting on the white walls. The whole place baffled and amazed him. A few moments ago he had been shouting and struggling in the midst of a seething crowd, distributing leaflets and now here he was in a quiet, luxurious room. This was utterly different from the dank, dark cells and the cruel torture he had anticipated when he was bundled into the car. These unexpected surroundings were not unfamiliar, however. He had lived in just such a world a long time ago. Before joining the revolution at the age of eighteen, he too had possessed a similar quiet, comfortable home, bookcases filled with books and an abundance of Maotai — his favourite drink. His father, a landowner and government official, had brought him up in comfort and luxury. But later, when he accepted the revolutionary truths taught him by a school friend who was a Communist, he entered a new world, a world of hard work, struggles, difficulties and dangers. It was a long time since he had thought of bookcases with doors to keep out the dust; of wine, of pretty curtains and fine paintings. Yet today, less than an hour after his arrest, when he again saw these luxuries, his long forgotten past came back to him. He felt as if he were in a dream-world.

Seated on the plush sofa, furtively glancing around, he was conscious of very mingled sensations. Just then a shiny door opened and in came a smartly dressed, heavily made-up woman, followed by a thin middle-aged man wearing a Western-style suit. Before he had decided what attitude to adopt, they were at his side, hands outstretched in greeting like old friends.

"How do you do, Mr. Tai!" The man tried to take his hand, but Tai Yu, casting him a bewildered glance, withheld it. He turned aside only to be confronted by the woman, who offered him her hand with a coy smile. Lowering his head in confusion, he avoided meeting her face to face.

These two Kuomintang agents alternated threats with "soft" tactics and soon Tai Yu began to waver. The warm familiar world of the past and his present luxurious surroundings attracted him like a magnet and broke down his feeble resistance. Before half an hour had passed he was sitting at the round table drinking Maotai with his host and hostess. He was allowed to leave soon afterwards. Just before he went out of the snug, tastefully furnished room, his host said, with an approving smile:

"You are a clever man, Mr. Tai. You will go a long way if you take care of yourself. I don't suppose you know who I am? My name's Hu Meng-an. I'm on the committee of the Kuomintang's Peiping headquarters. We must keep in close touch with each other in future."

The woman smiled graciously and languidly said, "I'm Wang Feng-chuan. We shall meet often, Mr. Tai."

So Tai Yu walked out of the Kuomintang's Peiping headquarters. Taking advantage of the fact that no one in the Communist Party knew of his arrest and the subsequent developments, he acted as if nothing had happened and re-established contact with the Party. Before long many of his one-time revolutionary friends were arrested and there were frequent raids on their headquarters. Lu Chia-chuan was one of those arrested on information supplied by this renegade.

When Lu Chia-chuan was driven out by Yung-tse, he returned to the lodgings of a friend with whom he had been staying, and was arrested before he crossed the threshold. He had long been prepared for this event, and had taken all the necessary precautions. The enemy found no incriminating documents on him, nor did their search of his friend's room reveal anything connected with revolutionary activities. He was escorted to the headquarters of the Third Regiment of Military Police, but they were unable to wrest a confession from him. Thus Lu Chia-chuan embarked on the hard struggle which all Communists must wage in prison and in the law courts.

At first, the enemy tried to make him capitulate by using the methods which had proved successful with Tai Yu. Their efforts proved useless, and he made use of the time during which they attempted to win him over to set up a Party branch and to lead a struggle against the prison authorities. When the enemy realized that he was too steadfast to turn renegade, they changed their tactics and subjected him to inhuman tortures. . . .

At midnight Lu Chia-chuan regained consciousness to find that he was lying on the floor of his cell, suffering agonies of thirst. His parched, cracked lips, clotted with blood, were burning, and there was a bitter, salty taste in his mouth.

"Water . . . Water . . ." he moaned. He tried to turn over, but piercing pains shot through him and, grinding his teeth, he lay still.

"Water. . . ." Scarcely conscious, he was only aware of an unbearable thirst. This, however, made him realize that he was still alive. He opened his eyes with an effort and looked around the dark cell. Beyond the iron-barred window high up the wall, he glimpsed a few stars gleaming in a patch of dark sky. The heavy tread of a sentry sounded in the distance. Some famished rats scurrying near him seemed eager to gorge themselves on his blood-caked limbs. . . . As he slowly and painfully regained possession of his faculties, one thought was uppermost in his mind, enabling him to forget his agonizing thirst and piercing pains.

"I must tell . . . my comrades. . . ." He lay rigid on the damp ground, fighting down his pain. "I must get word . . . to them. . . ."

He had been in the prison of the Peiping gendarmerie for more than two months. Cruel tortures had not succeeded in weakening his resolve. He had fought stubbornly on, although he had been beaten within an inch of his life. He had organized a hunger-strike within the prison in order to fight for a public trial and better treatment for political prisoners. On the third day of the strike, Lu Chia-chuan was dragged from his cell for another cross-examination just as they were drawing up a statement about the ruthless tortures and inhuman treatment to which political prisoners were subjected, to be sent out through a "connection" and made known to the general public. During the torture that followed, both his legs were broken and all his ten fingers were pierced with needles till the blood spurted. He was flogged till there was barely any breath left in his body, which was bruised and battered out of all recognition. Not one scrap of information passed his lips. The thought of Li Ta-chao, who had educated and trained him for the Party, was his constant inspiration. He was prepared to shed his last drop of blood for the cause to which he was devoted. . . . The wily enemy had deliberately stopped short of killing him. One day, lying scarcely conscious on the ground, he heard two of his would-be butchers say, "This fellow is finished. Why trouble with him any more? It would be simpler to put a bullet through him and have done with it!"

"An easy way out for him? No! Our commandant sets great store by him. Most probably he'll send him to Nanking as a prize catch."

. . . .

When Lu Chia-chuan regained consciousness and triumphed once more over death, his firm resolve to warn his comrades of their danger transcended all his suffering.

With an effort he opened his swollen eyes and peered into the darkness — it was not the old cell! He had been in a tiny cell at the end of a row, with a small opening in its small iron door. Through this opening he could see a fragment of grey wall and barbed wire. But beyond the window in this cell there was sky dotted with stars. Obviously, the enemy had taken quick action. They had moved him, and perhaps some of the others, in order to break up the Party organization and the stubborn hunger-strike of the political prisoners. They had shut him up in this cell to prevent him from having any contact with his comrades. . . . He lay still, thinking over the situation. He thought that he would probably soon be removed or taken out and shot. Whatever might happen he must find some means, while there was still a spark of life in him, to get word to his comrades.

He began to wrestle with his body, over which he had almost lost control.

His legs were broken, and the sinews holding the bones were mangled and bleeding. His back and arms were half paralysed by the torture he had endured. His swollen, blood-soaked hands were weighted with heavy handcuffs. Yet he was determined to act. He decided that his only course was to get to the wall, and so establish contact with his comrades.

He closed his eyes and remained motionless for a moment, in an attempt to gather together his reserves of strength. He tried to roll over, but found it impossible. Gnashing his teeth, he again exerted all his strength, but once more failed to move. A wave of excruciating pain shot through him and he lost consciousness again.

When, late that night, he came to and saw the patch of sky and a few wan stars, his mental agony far exceeded his bodily suffering.

". . . Will it be morning soon? . . . When daylight comes — will they let me live till daylight?" He recalled the events of that night. At about ten o'clock, when most prisoners were asleep, he had been unexpectedly taken out for interrogation. He was interviewed, in a badly lit room, by a fat, pasty-faced individual, seated behind a massive brown desk. This man greeted him with a vicious smile.

"You're a clever young fellow, aren't you, Feng Shen! It's too bad that you can't carry on with your operations. . . . Tell me the names of the members of your new Party organization. Quick now! . . . So you won't talk? Not even when you're reduced to such a state? . . . Forming a Communist Party branch right inside the prison, leading a hunger-strike to fight for what you call your rights . . . you're the ringleader in all this! You can't hide the facts from us now! . . . All right, I see you've made up your mind to sacrifice all your 'comrades'. Let me tell you, though, we know all their names, and all your plans. What's more, we're going to have the whole lot of you shot before you can pass word to anyone outside."

Lu Chia-chuan kept his head and remained silent notwithstanding the threats and bribes of this fat scoundrel. He knew that if the enemy really had the information they claimed, they would not be wasting time on him. They were simply bluffing. He also realized, however, that his organization's activities and plans had been betrayed. As things now stood, some prisoners might be killed as suspects. In the present emergency, because his comrades were ignorant of this surprise attack, he must expose this plot as quickly as he could, so as to avert the tragedy and enable the fight to continue till final victory.

Once again he tried to move his rigid body. He threw his whole weight on to his arms and, gritting his teeth, propped himself up. Blood and sweat poured from him.

Panting and delirious, he was still conscious of a terrible thirst which was draining away his last reserves of energy.

He was sinking into a coma. He licked his parched, swollen lips and tried to moisten his throat with saliva, but his mouth was completely dry. He clawed at the ground with his fingers, trying to get some damp earth to put into his mouth, but before he could manage it another agonizing pain shot through him.

From nearby came the sound of low voices and the heavy tramp of boots. Judging by his experiences of the last two months or more, it must be about three o'clock in the morning, the time the last night guards came on duty. In another hour or so it would be light, and then — but no, he might be dragged away at any moment. . . . His own life, his personal concerns counted for nothing, but the cause of the Party, the collective cause . . . must be safeguarded at all costs. The torch of struggle must be kept alight. He reproached himself for his weakness in the face of pain. He must fight on as long as he had breath, as long as he had a single drop of blood in his veins, against the enemy and his own "rebellious" body. With a violent spasm like that of a wounded tiger, he rolled over, but lost consciousness again.

When he came to, his lips were against the clammy ground. He smiled faintly, shut his eyes, disregarded the wild fluttering of his heart and the pain searing through his body, and inch by inch dragged himself forward on his elbows.

He fainted twice before reaching the wall. But the minute he recovered he made a supreme effort and, as if possessed of inexhaustible vitality, he reached the wall and with fingers thick and stiff as wooden pegs he rapped, rat-tat-tat-tat.

Several minutes passed. There was no response. The only answer to his anxious knocking was the scuffling of rats across the floor.

It would soon be dawn. Beyond the window the stars were fading. His time was fast running out, yet he had not accomplished his last task in prison.

"A man lives only once . . ." he said to himself, and a faint, self-mocking smile twisted his battered, livid face. "What! Am I to finish like this? Wait quietly for the butchers to take me out and shoot me? See my comrades trapped and do nothing? Never! . . ."

Somehow, he dragged himself to the adjoining wall. Again he knocked, and again there came no response. Then he turned to the third wall — his last hope. If there was still no response, all his efforts would have been wasted. It would mean there was no comrade near. Then what? . . . He could not bear to think any further.

Rat-tat-tat-tat.

Blood was once more flowing from his wounds, but disregarding it he repeated his knocking.

He pricked up his ears to listen.

Rat-tat-rat-tat-rat-tat.

The knocking from the other side made him frantic with joy. He had received an unmistakable reply from one of his own people. Over-excited, he fainted again. When he recovered consciousness, he was greatly enfeebled, but making sure that there was no other sound nearby to interfere with his signal, he tapped out a question in Morse code.

"Who are you?"

"Number Eight . . . Li Liang."

"Number One . . . Lu. . . ." He closed his eyes and rested a second before he resumed. "Urgent message. Pass it on, quickly. The situation in prison has worsened. The enemy knows our plan. Some of us, including myself, may be killed or removed. But the struggle must go on! Our hunger-strike and the enemy's scheme to kill the prisoners must be reported to the outside world. Make haste! Comrades in the prison must be vigilant and unite more closely. . . ."

He had finished what he wanted to say. All the blood seemed to have drained from his body, but Lu Chia-chuan's face was radiant with a gentle smile which sprang from happiness of a kind he had never before known. Now, at last, with this load off his conscience, he could lay down the heavy burden. His head sank to the ground and he lay completely still.

Chapter 23

Three days went by, but Lu Chia-chuan did not appear. Ten days passed, then a month, but still he did not come.

What could have happened?

Tao-ching distinctly remembered his assurance that in three days he would come back for his things. But there was no sign of him. With every passing day she lost hope, and as her anxiety grew, so did her self-reproach and anger against Yung-tse. She was desperately eager for news of Lu Chia-chuan, but did not know whom to contact. Their mutual acquaintance, Hsu Ning, had been arrested and Lo Ta-fang had gone to north Chahar. She had called at Sister Li's old address but the latter had moved away and none of her neighbours knew where she had gone.

As the days passed, Tao-ching felt more worried and her sense of loss deepened.

"Why didn't I make up my mind to let him stay here? Why didn't I do more to help him? . . . Suppose there were difficulties — couldn't I have overcome them?" Torn by remorse at what she considered the betrayal of a comrade and disgusted by the weakness and vacillation which had made her fail one whom she so deeply admired, she became increasingly repelled by the backwardness and selfishness of Yung-tse. Wrapped in painful thoughts, she would sit all day at the window, gazing dully at the emerald leaves of the solitary jujube tree in the courtyard. The world seemed to have turned grey, and the door of happiness that had opened to her knocking had swung shut again before she had time to enter. When no one was about, she would get out the brief-case left by Lu Chia-chuan and finger it — she had not burned it according to his instructions — hoping against hope that he would come back to claim it. Remorse and anxiety made her pale and haggard.

"What's the matter? Have you something on your mind?" demanded Yung-tse one day, noticing the change in her. She merely shook her head. But he persisted with his questions till she lost patience and burst out:

"No one with a conscience could rest easy! Who knows if he was betrayed or not! . . ."

Yung-tse stared at her with his narrow eyes, a mocking, supercilious smile on his face.

"So all this is on account of your respected friend Mr. Lu? . . . In that case, I advise you to forget him! No adventurer of his type ever came to a good end!"

Tao-ching looked straight at Yung-tse for a moment without saying a word. Then clutching his arm, she cried in despair:

"Is it true? How did you hear? . . . Has he been arrested?"

Yung-tse nodded with an air of insolent confidence. In fact Yung-tse had no idea what had happened to Lu Chia-chuan. He merely thought this was the best way to destroy Tao-ching's interest in him.

Tao-ching, at the end of her tether, sank down by the table, her head in her hands, and wept. The misfortune that had befallen a comrade she loved and honoured made her oblivious of Yung-tse's jealous taunts. He stood beside her, his thin lips tightly compressed, till at length he could contain his anger no longer.

"I can hardly believe your communism has cast such a spell on you!" he cried. "What a pity that he's been caught and your sweet dreams have come to nothing! . . . But never mind. You must still have plenty of other 'comrades' at large. . . ."

"Be quiet!" Tao-ching jumped up, trembling with rage. "How dare you make fun of my distress!" After a moment's pause, she sobbed, "How can you be so heartless! A fine young man is arrested — his life is in danger — but all you can do is gloat and jeer. . . . Just leave me alone!" Pushing Yung-tse aside, she ran out of the room.

When she came home that night, both of them shed tears — both of them grieved over their unhappy union.

Life had become utterly joyless to Tao-ching. She felt as if she were on a desert island, far from friends, relatives or anyone who could understand her sufferings and longings. One thing was plain, however. Two people holding different political views and travelling two different roads could not live together. It was self-deception to imagine that "affection", by itself, was enough to bind them — they were bound to destroy each other's peace of mind.

"I must leave him! I can't let him ruin my whole life!" This resolve was slowly taking shape in her mind.

One day she took out Lu Chia-chuan's brief-case again, meaning to burn the contents, since there was now no likelihood of his coming back. Opening it with some agitation, she discovered rolls of red, green and white leaflets which caused her a pang, oddly intermingled with pleasure. "Friend," she said to herself, "I feel you are here with me again!"

When Lu Chia-chuan gave her the brief-case she had restrained her curiosity to find out what was inside, and stowed the case away in a bundle of tattered cotton wadding. Today, however, she bolted the door, spread the leaflets on the table and started reading them eagerly. There were slogans mimeographed on thin paper in small but legible characters.

> Celebrate the Red Army's great victory over the fourth "encirclement and suppression" campaign of the Kuomintang!
>
> People of China, rise in arms! Down with Japanese imperialism!
>
> Long live the Chinese Communist Party!
>
> Long live the Chinese Soviet Government!
>
> . . . .

There were also two lengthy statements issued by the Peiping City Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the Peiping Anti-imperialist League.

The Chinese Communist Party! As Tao-ching read this dear, inspiring name, her fingers closed tightly round the leaflets, and all her fears and worries melted away. She felt as if she were meeting someone near and dear after a long separation. Under no circumstances could she burn such precious things! Pressing them to her breast, she reflected jubilantly that these red and green handbills with their challenge to all reactionaries had linked her own fate with that of the Communist Party. Surely they could never be separated again! She counted it a supreme honour and happiness to have had these leaflets entrusted to her keeping. . . . Her spirits soared, her faith in life was renewed.

"What shall I do with them if I don't burn them?" she asked herself that night. He would not come back, and it was dangerous to keep the leaflets. She thought of Vlassova in Gorky's *Mother,* who took leaflets to a factory and distributed them to the workers. "Yes, I should do the same!" she told herself. Like a soldier devising a good plan of attack, she was too excited to sleep. But how to set about the distribution? She was inexperienced, but knew the risks involved. After thinking over the matter for the greater part of the night, she hit upon what seemed to her a good plan.

Three days later, she went into action.

It was a summer night. Across the clear, star-studded sky the Milky Way lay like fine, gleaming sand, while the earth lay sleeping below. The deserted streets were silent except for the whisper of the breeze and the occasional barking of dogs. Through this eerie stillness, and in and out of the narrow lanes near the Red Building of Peking University, moved a modish young woman carrying a smart hand-bag. She glided along, alert to the slightest sound. Footfalls or any other sound in the distance made her halt and press her slim figure against the wall to listen intently, and with bated breath. Her dilated eyes gleamed in the darkness, and her heart beat so violently that she could almost hear it. When she was sure that there was no cause for alarm, she would relax and smile in an innocent, childlike way. Then, after pausing a little for breath, she would glide forward again like a dark shadow.

This was an extraordinary experience for Tao-ching. Never before in her life had she known such suspense and excitement. Her heart had been pounding ever since she decided to post up the handbills secretly at night. She had trembled more than once at the thought of being caught red-handed, but she was strengthened in her resolve as she recalled Lu Chia-chuan's parting injunction: "Have faith in our cause. Keep on fighting for a happy future. . . ." She must keep these unforgettable words firmly in mind and fight on fearlessly. So she had busied herself with the necessary preparations, which included the purchase of three small bottles of glue and a pair of soft-soled shoes that would make no noise. The question of a suitable disguise perplexed her till she went to borrow a small brush from her landlady and found her, heavily rouged and powdered, dressed in a sheath-like pink gown. She decided to pass herself off as a *demi-mondaine.* She told herself she would not even mind being mistaken for a street-walker. That evening, fearful that if Yung-tse saw her he would stop her, she went to the landlady's room to change, and put on a pale green silk gown. Then she rouged her lips, donned a pair of flesh-coloured silk stockings and with the aid of a smart hand-bag transformed herself into a glamorous young lady. The landlady gaped, because Tao-ching's dress had hitherto been plain and simple.

"She must be going out to meet a lover," thought the landlady, drawing upon her own experience. With a meaningful smile, she whispered, "Mrs. Yu, are you off? . . . Well, well! I quite understand. . . . So you have someone too. . . ."

Glad to have her conduct viewed in this light, Tao-ching smiled good-humouredly and before she left said:

"If Yung-tse should ask for me, please tell him I shall be back soon. Will you do me that favour?"

So she slipped out nervously, feeling like a raw recruit on the battlefield who has to advance alone. She stole in and out of the lanes like a prostitute searching for a client. When she had made sure there was no one about, she summoned up her courage for the task she had set herself. Moistening the tops of the glue-smeared leaflets with the tip of her tongue, she stuck several of them on a wall. Her hands shook, and her legs would hardly support her as she put up the first one. . . . At that moment, she visualized all the young men and girls she had met at the New Year's Eve party. . . . If they were here, the job would be done in no time. But she must go about it single-handed in the depth of the night, alone and afraid. She was not only apprehensive of the police but also of men who might think she was a street-walker. After pasting up a few leaflets and thrusting a few more through the slits of doors, she could continue no longer and hurried back home.

There she lay down utterly exhausted.

The next night she was working at the same task, but with more confidence. Setting out just before dawn, when the police on night duty were nodding with fatigue, she pasted up handbills or thrust them through doors in quite a number of lanes. Then, her quota done, she returned safely home.

The townsfolk were as stunned by these leaflets as if a hurricane had struck without warning. Young people passed them around as curiosities, and the old and timid were thrown into a panic.

"Is the number of Communists growing now?" they asked each other in astonished whispers.

The student associations in many high schools and universities received newspapers by post which, when unrolled, disclosed Communist leaflets which had been despatched by Tao-ching. Some of the students, encouraged as well as surprised, speculated for days on the identity of the sender. They were convinced, however, that the Communist Party was on the move again and thought that another high tide of the revolution was on its way.

The police who, early in the morning, made the startling discovery of Communist leaflets on the walls, were both angry and afraid as they hastened to tear them down.

Tao-ching, unknown to Yung-tse, resorted to every conceivable means to distribute the handbills, posting some of them to people she knew to be progressive. Before long, she had disposed of the larger portion. She kept the remainder because she could not bear to part with them all so soon.

Strange to say, the small red and green leaflets had rescued her from the brink of despair. There had been days when she felt that all was over with her, when without Lu Chia-chuan's guidance and the Party's care she was once again confined to a narrow, stifling existence as Yung-tse's docile companion, with nothing to look forward to but the day when he could afford to buy her velvet gowns and a woollen overcoat. . . . Such a future was too horrible to contemplate. Distributing the leaflets had brought her a sense of liberation. The more she disposed of, the happier she felt, for now she was not merely shouting slogans, a thing which Yung-tse sneered about, saying that this was all petty-bourgeois intellectuals could do. It gave her pleasure to know herself of use.

The time for the summer vacation arrived. Tao-ching wanted to find out the effect of the leaflets, and called on Wang Hsiao-yen, now in her second year at Peking University.

She grasped her friend's arm excitedly. "Hsiao-yen, yesterday morning I found something very odd!"

"What was that?" Hsiao-yen slowly closed the book in her hand to stare at her.

"Look!" Tao-ching took three leaflets out of her pocket. "Yesterday morning I was setting out to take a walk. I had no sooner stepped out of the door than I caught sight of these. . . ." She dropped her voice to a whisper. "Don't you understand? They are put out by the Chinese Communist Party!"

Hsiao-yen took them, glanced through them and threw them casually on the desk. "I thought you meant something really unusual . . . but there is nothing new about these. I've seen them before."

"That's very strange! Where could you have seen them?"

Hsiao-yen did not answer immediately, but opened a drawer and took out a package of sweets.

"Have a sweet, Tao-ching. My father has just brought these back from Shanghai. Tell me, why are you so interested in these leaflets? Is that why you came today?"

"The whole thing's beyond me. Can there be so many Communists still?"

"I think there must be quite a number," Hsiao-yen said as she sat down beside Tao-ching. With a sweet in her mouth, she slowly continued, "A few days ago, just before the term ended, our student association received a copy of the *Ta Kung Pao* through the post. Inside it were three leaflets just like yours. Some people were surprised and excited, others were afraid, and a few suggested that they should be posted on the bulletin board, but some did not approve of the idea for fear of the consequences."

"How about you? Were you afraid? You do some work for the association, don't you?"

"I didn't mind one way or the other, but those leaflets did appear on the board the very next day. They caused a great commotion. . . . The university authorities, of course, lost no time in tearing them down. President Chiang Men-lin was furious to find that things aren't back to normal even now."

Hsiao-yen tossed her thick black hair and gave a faint, solemn smile. Tao-ching was overjoyed. Her face radiant as a flower, she hugged her friend.

"Hsiao-yen! How happy you've made me!"

"What's the matter now? Why are you so excited? . . . Don't tell me that you had something to do with this?"

Tao-ching could no longer keep silent, and confessed all she had done.

"Mind you don't breathe a word to anyone, Hsiao-yen! . . . It was I who posted all those leaflets!"

"What! Do you really mean it? . . . When did you join the Communist Party?" said Hsiao-yen, staring at her incredulously.

"I'm not a Communist." Tao-ching shook her head dejectedly. "But I have friends who are — remember what I told you about Lu Chia-chuan? He left these leaflets with me before his arrest. After that I lost track of him. . . . I couldn't think what to do with the leaflets until I hit on this way of disposing of them."

Hsiao-yen looked at her as if she were seeing her for the first time.

"But why didn't you burn them? Don't you know how dangerous it is to post material like this?"

"No, Hsiao-yen, you don't understand!" One arm around her friend's shoulder, Tao-ching vehemently declared: "I've changed since last year. Now it makes me happy to be able to do things like this. . . . I'm feeling worried, though, because all those friends of mine have been arrested by the Kuomintang. . . . But never mind how many they imprison. Revolutionaries are just like the thick grass on the plain — 'no prairie fire can burn it utterly; the spring wind blows it back to life again'. I'm sure that they'll be back sooner or later." She looked out of the window at the clouds floating on high and then lowered her head again, saddened by her loss.

Impressed by her friend's courage and enthusiasm, Hsiao-yen pressed her hand, and was torn between exasperation and sympathy.

"I understand you, Tao-ching — you are like a flame. But think of your future! What future is there in joining the revolution! . . ."

"What future will there be if you just bury yourself in books all day?" Tao-ching was quite in earnest. "This is a time of national crisis, when the whole country is seething. Don't you know the proverb: 'No egg stays unbroken when the nest is upset'?"

Hsiao-yen grunted knowingly but said no more, absorbed in her own thoughts.

"Wake up, Hsiao-yen! We've known each other since we were children. If you're not angry with me, won't you help me a little?" Tao-ching took Hsiao-yen's arm, a new idea entering her mind. "I've still some leaflets left. It would be dangerous to hold on to them. Will you help me to distribute them?"

Hsiao-yen was thoroughly taken aback and did not know what to answer. After a long silence, she shook her head. "No, I can't!"

"And you call yourself a friend!" muttered Tao-ching indignantly, turning to go.

Hsiao-yen reluctantly pulled Tao-ching back. "All right. Give them to me. I'll try to get in touch with those students who were in favour of posting them on the bulletin board. To tell you the truth, I don't approve of this new whim of yours."

Tao-ching was too elated to listen to the concluding sentence. She squeezed Hsiao-yen's hand and excitedly said:

"That's wonderful! You're a true friend, Hsiao-yen! . . . When Lu Chia-chuan comes out, I promise to introduce you to him."

Chapter 24

For several days in succession Tao-ching, painted, powdered and smartly dressed, had been slipping in and out of the house at all hours — sometimes not returning till after midnight, at others going out just before daybreak. Yung-tse's anger knew no bounds; and as Tao-ching did not take him into her confidence, he had no idea where she was going or what she was doing. Once he ventured to ask, but she snapped, "Mind your own business!" He had finally come to the end of his patience, so one night when they were in bed, he gripped her arm and through clenched teeth demanded:

"What do you mean by this, Tao-ching? Aren't you ashamed of the way you're carrying on?"

She lay there quietly and did not speak for some time. After long deliberation, she reached a decision with regard to her future, and this helped her to remain calm. Sitting up to switch on the light, she replied in a hushed voice:

"Yung-tse, you know what a gulf there is between us. It's making us both unhappy. As we are still young, don't you think it would be better for us to separate?"

The thoughtful way in which she spoke and her gentle manner, so different from the stormy petulance of the past, made Yung-tse realize that the situation could not be saved. He could not hope to keep her. Her indifference to him was a blow to his pride. He sat up and thought for some minutes. Finally, with a frown, he said hoarsely:

"All right, then. Let each of us go our own way."

Early the next morning Yung-tse left the house. Soon after noon, Tao-ching had just finished packing her things ready to move to another hostel in the neighbourhood when a visitor called. He was a short, bespectacled man with a round, sallow face. Though she did not remember him, he greeted her like an old friend. Hurrying forward to shake her hand, he asked in a low voice:

"Are you Lin Tao-ching? I am Lu Chia-chuan's friend — Tai Yu."

Thinking that he was perhaps bringing her news of Lu, she ushered in the visitor with mixed sensations of joy and astonishment. Having offered him a seat, she asked eagerly:

"This is a delightful surprise. Has Brother Lu really been arrested? How is he now?"

Tai Yu did not answer at once. He looked around the room and then looked steadily at Tao-ching's face before replying quietly, "Yes, it was most unfortunate. He was arrested three months ago. At first he was detained in the military police headquarters. I don't know where he is now." His voice trailed off as he noticed that Tao-ching had turned pale and was gripping the bed-rail.

"Are you very attached to him, Comrade Lin?" He smiled gently at her.

Tao-ching was astonished and delighted to be greeted as "comrade". Though Lu Chia-chuan was her friend, he had never addressed her in this way. She suppressed her agitation over this confirmation of Lu Chia-chuan's arrest, to answer softly and warmly:

"I am so pleased to meet you! Though we've never met — no, that's not true, I remember now you were the one who spoke first at the March the Eighteenth rally — I can see Brother Lu must have told you about me! . . . I'm so inexperienced, I hope you'll often help me. . . ."

"Of course I will! Didn't you know that Old Lu and I are close friends?"

"Oh. . . ." Overwhelmed by a combination of sadness and joy, Tao-ching was at a loss to reply.

Tai Yu lighted a cigarette and took several puffs before asking casually, "By the way, didn't Old Lu leave something in your charge? What assignment did he give you the last time he was here?"

She told him the details of her last meeting with Lu Chia-chuan, and how she had distributed the leaflets.

Tai Yu listened attentively, then nodded and said:

"Well done! That was very brave. But why didn't you ask some other comrades to help? You know how dangerous it is to carry out a job like that alone."

"I didn't know anyone to ask! Brother Lu, Hsu Ning and the few other revolutionaries I knew had all been arrested."

"I see." Tai Yu's full eyes were intently watching her behind his spectacles, and the shadow of a smile hovered over his puffy, sallow face. "Well then, how do you intend to carry on the struggle?" He did not wait for an answer, but continued, "There are plenty of young progressives with leftist ideas. You must do all you can to enlarge your circle of friends and acquaintances. . . ."

"But," interrupted Tao-ching in a voice tinged with sadness, "I haven't a single progressive friend, Old Tai. Can you introduce me to some? I've been living such a futile life since Lu's arrest, I've become like a frog in a well. Now I'm going to leave my husband — perhaps you know about him? — because he's so backward. We have different outlooks and the only way I can be free is by leaving him. I do so want to make my life more meaningful, to live the way you and other comrades do. How I envy you your rich, militant life!"

"Yes, of course. . . ." With a cigarette between his lips, Tai Yu got up and walked round the room, examining this and that. When he saw an asparagus fern trailing emerald fronds on the wall and a small, fine antique porcelain vase on the bookcase, he turned to Tao-ching with a reproachful smile.

"Comrade Lin, these playthings of the bourgeoisie you have exhibited here do no credit to a revolutionary. A revolutionary fighter of the proletariat sets no store by such trifles because, as the saying goes: 'Delight in trivialities weakens a man's will.' Well, I must be going now. Please give me your new address so that I can call on you when I have the time. As soon as I have word of Old Lu, I'll let you know. . . . The important thing for you now is to take an active part in the revolutionary struggle and do your best to keep in touch with revolutionary organizations. Of course, the two of us have already established a sort of contact."

After seeing him off, Tao-ching returned to the room and sat on the edge of the bed. Her excitement at this renewed contact with the revolutionaries and the prospect of a more active life made her forget that it was time to move to her new quarters. Thoughts of Lu Chia-chuan made her heart grow heavy again. For some time she sat there motionless, blankly staring through the window at the azure sky, not waking from her reverie till her eye chanced to fall on the photograph of herself and Yung-tse, and his long blue gown on the clothes rack. She stood up and looked round, asking herself if she was really going to leave the man she had once loved so ardently? Would she never return to this small room where she had spent so many happy days? . . . Her bedding-roll was tied, her small suitcase was packed — everything else in the room would be left for Yung-tse. Her eyes grew moist. "I must leave at once!" Ashamed of her hesitation and sentimentality, she sprang to her feet and picked up her bedding-roll, but at the door she turned back to scribble a note:

September 20, 1933

Yung-tse,

I am going. I shan't be coming back. Take good care of yourself. Try to take a bigger view and don't take things too hard. I wish you every happiness!

Tao-ching

After a mental struggle and some painful self-reproach, Tao-ching finally picked up her bedding-roll again and left the room where she had known both happiness and boundless distress.

Chapter 25

The quiet little room was filled with soft, sweet music as Tao-ching sat on a stool before the steamer on the stove, singing in a low voice a song she had just composed.

Dark prison gate,
You can never shut out
The bright light of the sun!
Dear comrades,
Sun, flowers, skylarks,
And lovely young girls
Are all singing to you —
Yes, all of them singing to you,
Piercing the gloomy prison wall with their song.
. . . .

She sang it softly many times. Waking from her dreamy mood, she uncovered the steamer and took out the big, white rolls. "They're done!" she exclaimed with a slight smile of satisfaction at her handiwork. She carefully examined each of the rolls in turn, thinking, "Which of these contains the pencil lead? How pleased Hsu Ning and his comrades will be to get it!"

After leaving Yu Yung-tse, Tao-ching moved to a small hostel near the university. She was now freer to devote all her energy and time to establishing contact with the revolutionaries and had paid a visit to Hsu Ning's mother in order to get news of him. She learned that Hsu Ning was in the lock-up of the Peiping local court and, passing herself off as his sister, she accompanied Mrs. Hsu to see him. She was overjoyed with her visit, for her own sake as well as for Hsu Ning's. He had not neglected his personal appearance because

he was imprisoned, but looked trim and alert although he was both thinner and weaker. He showed no sign of despondency. Imprisonment seemed to have made a man of him.

"I'm all right and get enough to eat. . . ." he told Tao-ching, who was standing outside the iron bars of his cell. "They've had me up twice. The judge says my case isn't serious and that they'll let me go if I recant publicly through the newspapers."

"Recant publicly — what does that mean?" asked Tao-ching, staring at him.

Hsu Ning turned to glance at the gaoler pacing to and fro with slow, measured steps some distance away, and his smile became rather caustic.

"It means capitulation!"

"What are you going to do, then, Second Brother? Do you intend to recant?"

"No, never!" Hsu Ning shook his head and answered firmly. "All the political prisoners here have flatly refused to recant. If they press the matter we're going to protest by staging a hunger-strike. . . ." Hsu Ning had been talking in a whipser, but when he saw the gaoler approaching he raised his voice and smiled significantly at her. "So your school will be having its Sports Day soon, will it, Fourth Sister? That's fine. . . ."

As soon as the gaoler was again out of hearing, Hsu Ning went on softly, "I want to write something, but I've no pencil. Will you send in some steamed rolls with pencil lead hidden inside? . . ." She nodded with an understanding smile.

As she recollected this, Tao-ching again looked carefully at the rolls in her hand and, afire with the enthusiasm of youth, started to sing in a low voice:

Lead, precious little lead,
Hidden in soft, white rolls
Like gold dust hidden in sand.
Lead, precious little lead,
Slip past the guards' sinister eyes

To reach our comrades' hands.
Lead, precious little lead,
Sharp as a sword, keen as a dagger,
You'll write down the angry protests of the people
And stab at the throat of the reactionaries.
. . . .

Gazing out of the window with a roll still clutched in her hand, she sang softly to herself, hardly conscious of what she did. She was picturing the delight of Hsu Ning and his fellow prisoners when they received this lead and how they would lose no time in filling the margins of their books with close writing. The reactionary authorities had deprived the prisoners of pen and paper so that they could not record the protests of the people. Yet they would be writing away unceasingly with the lead she had smuggled in.

. . . Cheerful fancies like these kept her happy all evening, and she had shaken off the despair that had overcome her after Lu Chia-chuan's arrest. She was elated to have triumphed over her old self and was glad she was beginning a new life.

After supper, when she had tidied up the room, she hurriedly sorted out some books and began to put paper covers on them. She knew that books were badly needed in prison and was hoping to smuggle in revolutionary works by covering them with brown paper and writing on titles like *The Three People's Principles, Fundamentals of National Reconstruction, Seven Heroes and Five Gallants,* and *Pilgrimage to the West.* As she wrote she wondered what would happen if the gaolers found out. "Never mind, there's nothing to be afraid of!" she told herself, convinced that everything would go smoothly, that Fate had bowed to her will, and that she could now stand on her own feet.

That night Tai Yu came, bringing her some secret publications. He was very genial and spoke in slow, measured tones. Surveying her new lodgings, he remarked with a faint smile:

"Quite a nice place, simple and in good taste. . . . Have you been in touch with any comrades? From now on you should devote yourself entirely to revolutionary work."

"Old Tai, I've seen Hsu Ning!" said Tao-ching delightedly. She then told him how she had established contact. "Although he's in gaol now, I can see that the strength of the revolution is making itself felt everywhere. Imprisonment has made Hsu Ning firmer — isn't that a sign of the strength of the revolution?"

Tai Yu smoked one cigarette after another, raising his head from time to time to listen intently to Tao-ching's account of her activities. After she had finished, he nodded gently and said:

"Fine! I know Hsu Ning. And, I'm sure he'll become better still. Don't you know that even in prison you have the leadership of the Communist Party?"

"No, I didn't know that."

Tao-ching opened the *Red Banner of Northern China,* which Tai Yu had brought for her, and softly read out, "Fight to set up soviets* in northern China." She looked up eagerly and asked:

"Oh, is the Party calling on us to set up soviets in northern China? What's the situation now, Old Tai? I don't know enough of what's going on. . . ."

"This magazine was published some time ago. You want to know about the present situation? Well, the high-tide of the Chinese revolution is coming nearer and nearer, so we must rally enough forces to win even greater victories. . . ." He began to expatiate slowly on revolutionary theories, and although Tao-ching had heard or read about them before, she listened avidly, happy to have found a new leader. Later, when she was seeing him to the door, she asked casually:

"I'm going to see Hsu Ning tomorrow. Can you go with me?"

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* During the second revolutionary civil war, soviets were set up in the liberated areas under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

Tai Yu shook his head. "Don't mention me when you see him."

The following day was visiting day. After taking Hsu Ning the steamed rolls, Tao-ching went to Wang Hsiao-yen's home. Hsiao-yen, anxious to help her friend to earn a living, had suggested that Tao-ching become private tutor to her two younger sisters; so she spent every afternoon there. After supper with the Wangs, who lived in the west city, she started home. It was dark, but she decided to walk and save the fare. She had passed the Peihai Bridge and the Palace Museum when a car turned out of East Chingshan Street and screeched to a stop before her. Paying no attention, she continued walking. The door of the car opened, two men jumped out, and without warning she found her arms held in a vice-like grip by the men, one on each side of her. In another moment a third man appeared and, before she had time to call out, he stopped her mouth with a gag. In the twinkling of an eye she was dragged into the car which promptly drove off at full speed.

Chapter 26

It was like a nightmare to Tao-ching. Before she could realize what this abduction meant, two rough hands covered her eyes and she was blindfolded with a piece of black cloth. In the fearful darkness she was too confused to think clearly. As the car sped along her heart kept missing a beat, and she felt as if she were falling into an abyss.

Eventually she was pushed out of the car, the bandage was taken from her eyes, the gag from her mouth, and her hands were released. She began to realize what had happened, for she remembered that the Kuomintang often seized suspects by these sinister means, and that the young people thus kidnapped seldom came back.

"I'm ready to die if the time's come to give my life for the cause!" While she was forming this resolve, the men pushed her through a doorway. She kept her eyes closed, shrinking from the sight of this evil place. She acted like one doomed to die and waiting to breathe her last.

"A young student! What are you doing here?"

"What charge are you here on?"

"Why don't you open your eyes? This is no place for old nuns to meditate. Why do you keep your eyes shut?"

Eagerly accosted by many women, Tao-ching finally opened her eyes. The dark, dank, crowded confinement and the stench made her realize that she was in a prison and not in an ogre's cave or on an execution-ground. Someone offered her a seat, and she perched on the edge of a bed while the other prisoners crowded round.

"What are you in for?" asked several of them inquisitively.

"I don't know." Tao-ching rubbed her arms, still smarting from the rough handling she had received, and looked at the strange faces round her. "I was seized on my way home from a job of teaching and forced into a motor-car. Some men blindfolded and gagged me and brought me here."

"Oh, she must be a political prisoner! I wonder why they brought you here? This is no place for you." The speaker, a thin slatternly drug-addict with dark circles under her eyes, puckered up her brows as she spoke.

Tao-ching hastened to ask with dismay, "What are you all charged with?"

Before the drug-addict could answer, a fat woman with gold-filled teeth began ticking off crimes on her fingers.

"What are we charged with? Every crime under the sun — prostitution, gambling, traffic in drugs, robbery, abduction, elopement, taking heroin!" At mention of the latter, she glanced at the thin woman and sniggered, again showing her golden teeth.

The thin woman flushed angrily and proceeded to take her revenge by saying:

"You don't know! We have prostitutes here, procuresses and pimps — a whole lot of sluts who are ready for anything.

They think syphilitic sores on their faces are something to be proud of. . . ."

The fat woman lost her temper, slapped the thin woman's face, spat at her, and created an uproar which almost raised the roof of the dark fetid cell. Wails, shouts and curses filled the air till the wardress hurried to the scene and established order with a burst of foul language. Tao-ching felt nothing but disgust for this motley crew and wished she had been put with the political prisoners, even if it meant that she would be shot. She looked at the women crowded into the cell. A few, dressed like villagers, were hanging their heads in a dispirited way; some dressed in stained and tattered silks and satins seemed to have no cares and were humming bawdy ballads; others were chewing opium or lying on plank beds blowing smoke-rings from cigarettes and rolling their eyes.

"Where have I seen people like this before?" Tao-ching wondered, as she stood in one corner. Suddenly she had a vision of her father's concubines and her stepmother's spiteful expression; she heard bawdy songs and the clatter of mahjong pieces, and recalled many scenes and faces long forgotten. She spat on the floor in disgust to rid her mind of them. When she saw there was no room for her on any of the beds, she squatted in her corner, burying her head in her hands, pretending to be asleep.

The floor of the cell was damp and cold. When squatting became too tiring she sat down. Unable to sleep, she cudgelled her brains to try and think out how the Kuomintang had discovered her and why she had been taken to the cell. If it was because of the distribution of the handbills or because of her revolutionary friends, she should surely have been put with the political prisoners. There were still a few leaflets in the pockets of some clothes in her trunk, and the banned publications, lent to her by Tai Yu, were at the bottom of it. The police might search her trunk and find them; and the Kuomintang might shoot her for that. At this thought, she grew hot and cold by turns. Wide-eyed, she felt no desire to sleep, and did not doze off till nearly dawn.

The next afternoon she was taken out for questioning. The judge had only just asked her name, age and place of origin when from the dark recess behind the grim court appeared a tall, slender man wearing a Western suit. He stepped up to the judge and whispered to him for a few minutes. The judge nodded repeatedly. The man's face seemed familiar to Tao-ching, but she could not place him. She had not recovered from her surprise at this interruption when the judge informed her:

"Lin Tao-ching, your case has been transferred to the Kuomintang's city headquarters. You are now released on bail guaranteed by Mr. Hu Meng-an."

"Who is this Hu Meng-an? Why should he go bail for me?" With a heavy heart and grave misgivings, she walked out of the building, passed a forbidding dark grey wall, and turning to look back realized that she had spent the night in the lock-up of the Public Security Bureau. She hired a ricksha to take her straight back to her lodgings. Once there, she started looking round to see if anything was missing. The door opened and in walked the man responsible for her release.

"I'm afraid you've been badly frightened, Miss Lin! I looked in to see how you are!" With a smile he took off his smart grey felt hat, and greeted her with a bow.

Tao-ching jumped up as if stung by a scorpion. Too appalled to speak, she retreated to a corner of the room to stare at Hu's thin yellow face and the flashing whites of his eyes. This was the Director Hu who had schemed with her stepmother to marry her. Evidently he was a special agent of the Kuomintang's city headquarters.

"Now don't be afraid, Miss Lin!" he chuckled. "I haven't seen you for a long time, and I've come especially to inquire after you. Please sit down." The guest waved his hostess to a chair. Tao-ching did not sit down, but with another bow Hu took a seat.

Tao-ching did her best to overcome her panic and hide her loathing for this man. She walked slowly to the door and stood there.

"How time flies! It is more than two years since we last met." Hu Meng-an, quite at his ease, was puffing one smoke-ring after another and speaking in the well-modulated voice of a scholar and gentleman. "When you left home, your mother was nearly distracted. I was worried too. . . . Do you know what a great admiration I have for you, Miss Lin? . . . I was so wounded by your departure that I have never considered marriage since. . . ." He stubbed out his cigarette and glanced expectantly at Tao-ching, who was now deathly pale.

But the girl neither looked at him nor uttered a word.

When he saw that she had no intention of answering, Hu lit another cigarette. Finding his hard chair uncomfortable, he moved it out a little and leaned the top against the wall, so that he could loll back as if in an easy chair.

"I don't suppose you know all that has been happening to your family!" There was bogus concern in his eyes, now narrowed almost to slits. "Your mother has died, and your father has gone to Nanking. I intended to take care of your younger brother Tao-feng, and bring him here to study in Peiping, but he chose to go south with his father. The two of them are probably in Nanking now. Well, Miss Lin, I hear you have a husband to your liking. Why isn't he here?"

Tao-ching shuddered, wondering how he knew so much about her. Shifting her position a little, she coolly rejoined:

"Yes, we get on very well."

"Ha, ha, ha!" His loud shrill laughter sounded like the blast of a whistle in the small dark room. "Don't try to fool me! Getting on well? You've separated. Because of divergent outlooks, wasn't it? . . . Well, Miss Lin, I guess that you are in financial difficulties. We're old friends. Don't have any scruples. Let me look after you. I don't suppose you know what's been happening to me. During the last two years, things have gone well for me. I have an income almost too large for a bachelor. . . ."

Tao-ching could contain herself no longer. She spat out her answer with loathing, through clenched teeth:

"If you have any business with me, say so frankly. Why did you have me arrested? Why did you bail me out? I don't want to hear anything about the past. That family and you mean nothing to me."

Pleased to have goaded Tao-ching into speaking, Hu Meng-an straightened up, put down his cigarette and inclined his head to listen attentively. When she finished, he smiled calmly and picked up his cigarette again.

"Those are easy questions to answer. You were arrested because the Third Regiment of Military Police knew that you had taken part in Communist activities. Fortunately, when I heard of it, I was able to bail you out in the name of the Kuomintang headquarters. . . . Don't be childish now, my dear young lady! Calm yourself! I took up this work, you know, because I love young people and want to save them. . . ." He nodded with a self-satisfied look, then drawled in an affected tone, "The number of young people deluded by the Communist Party has not been small, I'm afraid. But I never thought, Miss Lin, when you left home to make your own way in the world, that you would be one of their victims. I never thought it of you! I never thought it of you!" He sighed repeatedly, tilting back his chair for greater comfort. "You have nothing to worry about, Miss Lin," he went on slowly. "With me to help you, nothing can harm you. Even if you have taken part in activities harmful to the Republic, as long as you have my help, I can promise you. . . ."

"I've never done anything harmful to the nation! I don't need your help!" said Tao-ching, nearly choking with rage, and her eyes flashing fire. "I saw through you long ago. I know what you are! You and I have nothing in common. I don't want your promises, I don't want your pity! The authorities can do what they like with me!"

Hu's smile disappeared and his thin face was twitching as if someone had slapped him. But being a man of considerable experience, he made haste to assume a conciliatory expression. Gazing intently at Tao-ching, whose pallor made her more beautiful than ever, he proceeded calmly:

"Please don't misunderstand me, Miss Lin! As old friends, we can talk frankly. Do you know how serious the charges are against you? Who was it who posted up all those Communist propaganda leaflets in the streets of Peiping? Who sent leaflets to many schools? Who took part in the subversive Communist riots in Peiping? Whose trunk contained Communist publications and documents? You must know how serious all these charges are, and I need not say more. Commandant Chiang Hsiao-hsien is utterly ruthless — he kills people without blinking an eye. Having collected all this information about you, he wants to judge your case himself. So you see, Miss Lin, your position is very critical. . . . I'm not asking for thanks, but the fact is, I went to a lot of trouble to get your case transferred to the Kuomintang's city headquarters. The case may be easy to settle or it may be difficult, that depends on your attitude. I'm sure you're intelligent enough, Miss Lin, not to insist on knocking your head against a brick wall. Surely you won't throw your precious life away?" An unmistakable threat lay behind this earnest, persuasive speech, at the conclusion of which he heaved a deep sigh as if expressing heartfelt sympathy.

Tao-ching remained motionless during this catalogue of her actions, her distress and fear doubled by the enemy's discovery of her secrets. She bit her lip hard and tried not to tremble, wondering desperately, "How did they find out?"

"Don't worry, dear lady, you can rely on me. . . ." purred Hu Meng-an, quietly rising, walking over to her and putting his hands on her shoulders.

"Don't you dare touch me!" cried Tao-ching, darting to the other side of the table. Panting as she looked him steadily in the eyes, she challenged him: "You speak of leaflets, of riots, of the Communist Party — it's all a wicked lie! What proof have you?"

Hu Meng-an, without answering, glanced at her and then picked up the big leather brief-case on the table. He slowly took several red and green leaflets and a number of magazines

from it and proudly flashed them before her. "What are these, young lady?" he demanded with a smile.

As she looked at the familiar handbills, the bright characters "The Chinese Communist Party" caught her eye, and she saw that the *Red Banner of Northern China,* given her by Tai Yu, had also fallen into the enemy's hands. Her heart was burning, and she was ready to weep. Never before in her life had she known such a frenzy of hatred. All her past hatred for her father and stepmother, for society and those who had persecuted and insulted her mother and herself, was now centred upon this man who had stolen her leaflets. She gazed steadily at him, her pale face flushed crimson, anger making her forget that she was dealing with a wily enemy. In her innocence, she cried recklessly, "The leaflets are mine! It was I who sent them to the various schools. . . . I hate you! I hate you! Now do your worst!"

Hu Meng-an's face twitched again, but with a show of indifference he laughed and said:

"I'm genuinely sorry for you, Miss Lin! Why should someone of your intelligence suddenly lose all sense of balance? Don't be so stubborn. You must be very tired. Try to have a good rest. I am going now, but I shall come back some other time."

He closed his brief-case and put on his hat. On his way out he turned to give a parting nod to Tao-ching, who was standing dazed by the window.

"Think it over well. Use your intelligence, my dear young lady. I won't trouble you any more just now."

Chapter 27

The next morning Tao-ching rose, tired after a sleepless night. She was no sooner up than Hu Meng-an arrived, dressed in a smart brown suit, with his large brief-case in one hand and a bouquet of roses in the other.

"Good morning, Miss Lin! You're up early." He made a deep bow, put the flowers in a glass vase and stood by the door to light a cigarette, glancing sideways at her as he did so.

Tao-ching's face grew very red when she saw the bouquet. She wanted to hurl this hateful man's flowers outside, but she controlled herself, and put her clenched hands behind her.

They watched each other in silence for a while.

"Yesterday I saw that you were not in a good mood," said Hu at last. As if tired of standing, he tilted a chair against the wall and sprawled on it. Closely watching, he continued expansively, "So I didn't finish what I wanted to say. Today you ought to be calmer and we can talk this over properly." He lit another cigarette and blinked thoughtfully, then turned with a smile to Tao-ching who had not moved. "As an old family friend, Tao-ching, I am really very much concerned for you. I needn't talk about what passed between us — I believe in freedom in love, and shan't put any pressure on you. But I must make clear how much I love and respect you. During the last two years I have thought about you every day. You probably don't want to hear this, so I shan't talk about it any more just now. I believe absolute sincerity will move a heart of stone, not to say your heart, when the time comes. For the moment, let us talk of the most urgent matter. Last night, Chiang Hsiao-hsien telephoned again to ask about your case. He is giving it special attention and wants it settled as quickly as possible. The best thing I could do was to come early this morning to warn you." He drew deeply on his cigarette and then threw it away half-finished. Closing his eyes for a moment in silent reflection, he re-opened them to say with a smile, "Tao-ching! You're certainly in a critical position. You must trust me and believe that I have your interests at heart. You are still little more than a child, and don't understand the complexity and wickedness of this society. The Communist Party is pretending to save our country, our people and the whole world, in order to lead the youth astray. How many young men and girls have been victimized by it! Can the world be saved by a little blind enthusiasm? Can a society so thoroughly rotten as the one we have in China be saved by enthusiastic youngsters like you? Wake up, Miss Lin, I beg you! Look at life more clearly! Then you'll turn back from the wrong path you've taken."

Talk like this jarred on Tao-ching's ears and made her heart contract in pain. She cried out in protest, hardly knowing what she was saying:

"Don't talk nonsense! I refuse to listen."

Still lying back as if nothing were amiss, he continued with a smile:

"Now, Miss Lin, don't be so reckless! What's the use? Many young people, when first arrested, try to brave it out. It seems the fashionable thing to do. But they are foolish, foolish in the extreme." He shook his head pityingly and tapped one of his feet by way of emphasis. After waiting in vain for some response, he proceeded, "This fellow Chiang Hsiao-hsien is utterly ruthless. Last night he had another fifteen Communists shot, all pleasant, hopeful young people in the spring-time of life, three of them girls. Please think, Tao-ching, is it worthwhile? Why sacrifice your precious life needlessly? Will this world become a paradise on earth just because a few of you die?"

"Mean, petty souls can never understand a fine heroic cause! Come to the point, Mr. Hu. If Chiang Hsiao-hsien has sent you to arrest me, I'll go with you!" Tao-ching, her eyes looking out through the window, was speaking more calmly now.

"Come now, Miss Lin, this is no joking matter! As if I could do such a thing! If I were in charge, it would be very simple. Unfortunately you have fallen into the hands of Chiang Hsiao-hsien, who only released you when I insisted on bailing you out. I want to — I must — find a way to save you!" He went to the table where his brief-case was lying and took out a roll of bank-notes. Slowly approaching Tao-ching, he held out the notes and urged her, "Take this money and make yourself some good clothes, Miss Lin. Life is fleeting. I have known many beauties, but none to compare with you. . . . Don't be offended now, it's only a small sum."

Tao-ching stood there white as a sheet, motionless as a statue.

"Please take it! Take it in your jade-white hands!" With a sidelong glance at her, Hu took her hand.

Smack! The roll of notes flew into his thin, complacent face before scattering over the floor. For a moment he was dumbfounded.

Then, with a few swift movements, Tao-ching threw Hu Meng-an's flowers into the courtyard, and rushed out towards the front gate. A rough-looking man blocked her pathway, growling:

"Stay where you are!"

He was an armed agent in plain clothes who had been stationed at the gate so that she could not get away. She fell back in dismay and leaned against the screen at the entrance to the inner courtyard to recover her breath. When she was a little calmer, she stepped under a lilac tree. Her eyes strayed to the doors of the other rooms in the compound, searching for some place of refuge; but every door was shut tight. The occupants evidently knew that something was wrong and had quietly locked themselves in.

When she realized that there was no escape, she was prepared to face the consequences.

"Stand still! Don't move!" shouted Hu Meng-an, as he dashed into the courtyard after picking up his bank-notes. Gone was his solicitude of a moment before. Like a highwayman, he directed a pistol at her. His eyes were blazing, and his voice shook with anger as he snarled, "You deserve the worst possible fate." He gnashed his teeth, flourished his pistol and swore, "You bitch! Don't you understand you're an important Communist criminal? Have you no sense of shame? I've been trying to save you out of the kindness of my heart . . . but you refuse to repent. . . . You shameless bitch!"

Tao-ching stood calmly under the lilac tree, the early morning sun illuminating her pale, expressionless face. She was neither afraid, nor angry. She was beyond thought and feeling. If the scoundrel had fired, she would not have attempted to escape. But Hu Meng-an was simply bluffing. When he saw her apparent indifference, he gave a couple of angry laughs and said, "You're a bold one, aren't you? You struck me! You dared to strike *me*! . . . In view of your youth, I'll give you one more chance. You shall have three days to think things over. After that, if you still show no signs of repentance. . . ." He cast her an ugly glance and spat in disgust. "Then, young lady, you can't blame Hu Meng-an for whatever happens!" With that he stamped off, his brief-case under his arm.

Realizing her persecutor had gone, Tao-ching went back to her room and collapsed limply on to a chair, feeling lonelier and weaker than ever before in her life. Her small quarters seemed vast and ominously still, cigarette butts were scattered all over the floor and everything was in disorder. Leaning her head on the table, she broke down and wept.

"Don't cry like that! Who was the bully who was here just now?" Tao-ching felt a warm hand caressing her and raised startled eyes to find four or five of her neighbours, Peking University students, standing around her. The one speaking to her was a pretty, slender girl whom she did not know by name. All their faces expressed deep concern too.

"Who was that bully? What did he want? . . ." the girl asked eagerly, while the four men looked at her with great concern. Tao-ching was deeply touched. Gathering new strength, she rose to offer them seats. Then drying her tears she told them all that had happened in the last few days. The other girl cried out indignantly, "The beasts! How utterly vile!"

A man of about thirty, in glasses and wearing a long gown, shook his head and pursed his lips wrathfully. "The idea!" he exclaimed. "Threatening you with a pistol! You can take the case to court and sue him!"

"Don't you believe that, Brother Teng! You spend all your time on the ancients, and you don't know what the world is like today," retorted a younger student with a smile. "You'd get nowhere by taking the matter to court. Even if you went to the Nanking government, it would be of no use — they're all in league together. There's no justice in the present social set-up."

The young people looked at each other. Though they sympathized with their unfortunate neighbour, they could think of no way out.

"Thank you all," said Tao-ching softly. "I'm not the only one to be victimized. . . ."

"That's just it! . . ." someone agreed compassionately as all the men left, sighing. When they had gone, the girl pressed Tao-ching's hand sympathetically and suggested:

"Shall I go and fetch Wang Hsiao-yen so that you can talk things over with her? I know you are good friends. I'm Li Huai-ying, by the way, Hsiao-yen's fellow student."

"I'll go myself."

"No, you'd really better not go. There may be spies outside waiting for you. Quite a number of men were outside the gate a few minutes ago." With a gentle wave of her hand, Li Huai-ying darted off like a swallow.

Tao-ching had no lunch and also went without supper. When dusk fell, she was still lying on her bed, her mind in a turmoil and torn by deep anxiety. She realized that she was in serious trouble. Things were not so simple as she had imagined during the night in the lock-up. She had been expecting death, which would have ended all her tribulations, but she had escaped that and had to face a very complicated situation. Now, instead of wanting to die she burned to avenge herself on Hu Meng-an, to struggle against other vicious scoundrels like him. She was conscious that she was weak and powerless, and utterly alone with no comrades or family to help her! Lu Chia-chuan and Hsu Ning had been arrested, while she never knew when to expect Tai Yu and there was no way of getting in touch with him. What was she to do?

The door opened and she heard light footsteps and the gentle voice of Li Huai-ying asking:

"Why didn't you turn on the light? Were you tired of waiting?"

Tao-ching put on the light and took Huai-ying's small cold hand in hers.

"I saw Wang Hsiao-yen!" announced Huai-ying in a low voice. "She was fearfully worried about you but could think of no way out. We went together to see Hsu Hui, who used to be on the committee of our student association, and she thought up a plan. She's coming to see you in my room tomorrow afternoon. Here is a letter for you from Hsiao-yen."

"Hsu Hui? I know her!" Cheered by this development, Tao-ching expressed her thanks and asked for more news of Hsu Hui, but all Huai-ying would say was:

"I'm going back to my room. There seem to be secret-service men outside all the time. Hsu Hui said we should be careful what we talk about when we're together, and we shouldn't be together too much. You'd better not go out, not even to Hsiao-yen's home."

At five the next afternoon, when students were passing in and out of the hostel after their classes, Huai-ying was visited by a fashionably dressed, slim, vivacious girl. As soon as Tao-ching saw through the crack of her door that this was Hsu Hui, who had tackled the chief of the Inner Sixth Ward at the March the Eighteenth memorial meeting, she hurried over to Li Huai-ying's room to meet her. Hsu Hui quickly rose, smiled and seized her hands.

"Lin Tao-ching!" she exclaimed. "I haven't seen you for so long. What a pleasant surprise to find you here! . . ."

Huai-ying closed the door and went out to buy something to eat.

Holding Hsu Hui's hand, Tao-ching was too excited to speak.

Hsu Hui smiled at her and said, "Tao-ching, is it true that you asked Wang Hsiao-yen to help you distribute some leaflets?"

Tao-ching's eyes brightened and her anxious face flushed with pleasure. She nodded gently.

"It is — did you help too?"

"Let's not talk about that now! Please tell me what's been happening to you." Hsu Hui's eyes were bright and very observant.

Tao-ching described how she had been arrested and met Hu Meng-an. Hsu Hui listened carefully, sometimes she shook her head with an indulgent smile, sometimes she frowned and patted Tao-ching's shoulder. Finally she gave her opinion like an old friend.

"Tao-ching, you mustn't be hurt if I speak my mind. You are brave enough when it comes to a fight, and I like your frankness and honesty; but your tactics are no good. Why should you tell that assassin the truth? That was really very foolish. You should never have admitted that you distributed the handbills! And tell me, how did they really find out about you? Do you know?"

Blushing, Tao-ching grasped Hsu Hui's hand and cried as she looked into her brilliant eyes:

"Big Sister Hsu! I see now how very foolish I've been! I can't understand my arrest at all. I'm quite bewildered by it. What do you advise me to do?"

"H'm. . . ." Hsu Hui looked thoughtful. "What are you planning to do?"

"I'd like to run away, but I don't know how to."

Hsu Hui chuckled.

"You're right! You ought to get away! Just make up your mind and we'll help you." At that moment Huai-ying returned with some peanuts, melon seeds and crab-apples. Once inside, she whispered softly to Tao-ching:

"There's someone waiting outside to see you."

"Who is it?" Tao-ching was startled.

"I don't know him." Huai-ying shook her head.

Tao-ching sprang up and looked at Hsu Hui with anxious eyes as if asking, "What shall I do?" The latter quietly whispered some advice to her which brought a smile to her face.

Chapter 28

Hurrying into the courtyard to see who her visitor was, Tao-ching found a fair-complexioned young stranger, in Western-style dress, standing outside her door. He went up to her, looked at her intently and gripped her hand, saying, "Sister, don't you know me?"

"Tao-feng!" exclaimed Tao-ching excitedly, recognizing her younger brother, who had grown into a tall young man since she had seen him three years before. She led him inside and, forgetting all her troubles, said with a laugh, "Brother, come and sit down! What has happened to you and the family during the last few years?"

Instead of taking a seat, Lin Tao-feng stood in the middle of the room looking round appraisingly. A close scrutiny of the furnishings and his sister's dress seemed to cause him some disappointment.

"I heard you were married, sister. Why are you living on your own in a place like this?"

"Yes, I'm on my own here, brother. Do sit down!"

Tao-feng pulled out a handkerchief to dust a chair before complying. "Where is my brother-in-law?" he asked with a smile. "What does he do for a living? Is he very rich?"

Tao-ching was a little put out. "Why ask about him? I left him long ago. Tell me, where is the family now. Where have you come from?" Although she hated her family and had had nothing to do with it for years, Tao-ching displayed a momentary revival of interest and concern.

"Mother died last year," he said in a tone of indifference. "I've been with father these last two years. . . . Did you know that he's become an official again? Our home is in Nanking — that is to say, he lives in Nanking, I live in Shanghai. I haven't told him that I'm studying at Aurora University there."

"Why did you come to Peiping then? And where is father?"

"Father?" Tao-feng took out a fine handkerchief. "The old man needs money and, though the land outside the Great Wall is all sold, he got such low prices that he wants me to go and press the tenants for more. He's gone to Jehol, leaving me here to try and secure the help of the concubine of the secretary general of the Jehol provincial government. It's hard to collect any money from those damned tenants without a show of force."

Only now did Tao-ching notice her brother's well-pressed foreign suit, his glossy hair, and his pompous, shallow appearance. "So this is what he's grown into. . . ." She knitted her brows and slipped up to him, unable to restrain herself from urging:

"Tao-feng, don't help father in such a wicked scheme! The farm tenants are already wretched enough, with nothing to eat or wear. Besides, that land has been sold — how can he squeeze more money out of them? After bleeding them white, he wants to rub salt into their wounds!" Thoroughly roused, she continued vehemently, "I realize now, brother, that our parents and both of us bear a load of guilt. You and I were brought up on the blood of these tenants. Father's way will lead to a dead end, just as mother's did. But we are still young, we can take a different path. . . ."

Tao-feng put out his tongue at this strange talk, and interrupted:

"Listen, sister, I already have a girl friend. Her name's Kao Ling-ling and she's very good-looking. She comes of a wealthy family and is the queen of the university. We're engaged and father says if we can get a little more money for our land outside the Great Wall, he'll use it for our wedding. 'Self-love was planted in man by Heaven.' Since I can't make all those wretched tenants rich, they may as well contribute to my well-being."

Tao-ching flared up at such cynical egoism.

"Brother!" she protested. "How can you be so mean and despicable? Think what you're saying! You're talking like a landlord or capitalist. Don't you know that those classes have no future, that they're doomed? . . ." In her agitation, she forgot her own dangerous position, and described the class struggle and the future development of human society.

Tao-feng listened with growing impatience, until he could stand no more. He rose abruptly, picked up his hat and said with a scornful laugh:

"Don't talk such nonsense, sister! You're a Communist, aren't you? Well, that's no joking matter." Pretending to saw at her throat with his hand, he warned in a low voice, "Mind you don't lose your head!"

Tao-ching remained standing where she was for some time after he left. Regretting what she had said, she reproached herself in a dazed fashion, saying, "What a fool I am! Do I have to bare my heart just because he's my brother?" She remembered Hsu Hui's caution against telling the truth to the enemy. By degrees she calmed down, however, as she recalled the other's parting whisper, "Stay in till dusk when someone will come to help you get away, but don't breathe a word about this to anyone." Laughing, she put her hands to her burning face and whispered to herself, "What a fool I am compared with her!" Her sense of isolation had gone, for she was greatly encouraged by the genuine sympathy and warm support she was receiving. It seemed that if you could only keep afloat and struggle on in the sea of life, you would never be allowed to drown. As she began to put her things in order, she wondered what the new chapter in her life would bring. Another of Hsu Hui's questions came sharply to mind. "How did they really find out about you?"

How? . . . Tao-ching put down the volume of *World Culture* she was holding and sat on the bed to think. With the exception of Yung-tse and Wang Hsiao-yen, Tai Yu was the only one who was close to her and knew anything of her affairs. Yung-tse would never go to the length of informing against her, she reasoned, while open, straight-forward Hsiao-yen was even more to be trusted. As for Tai Yu — a revolutionary himself — how could he do such a thing? Completely puzzled, she could reach no conclusion.

"Why did you tell the truth? That was really very foolish!" Recalling Hsu Hui's words again, she laughed in scorn of herself. "Renegades — do you suppose there are no renegades in the camp of the revolution?" The last time they met, Lu Chia-chuan had told her that many of his comrades had been arrested through betrayal by renegades. Recalling this, she felt that much of Tai Yu's behaviour was open to suspicion. . . . But she immediately reproached herself, "No, it can't be!" and brushed these suspicions aside as ridiculous. Late that night, she lay in the dark, turning over endless questions in her mind, unable to find an answer to them. Oppressed by so many problems, she longed for someone to consult. How different everything would be if only Lu Chia-chuan were with her now! At the thought of him, she jumped up and turned on the light, sitting down at the table to write down some of the many things she wanted to tell him.

"Brother Lu," she wrote, then crossed out these two words and started again, this time omitting his name.

My dearest adviser and friend,

I am writing to you in Peiping on October 19, 1933. I don't know where you are imprisoned now or anything of what you have been suffering. But I feel I must write to you, friend, because I have so much to say, so much to tell you. First let me give you my most important news, which I am sure will please you. I have stopped hesitating, and resolutely joined you on the road which you are travelling. I have also managed to overcome those unhealthy petty-bourgeois weaknesses — sentimental attachment to the past and indiscriminate sympathy for others regardless of principle. I have made a new start in life. To be more precise, I have left Yu Yung-tse. It hurts me, friend, to think of the year that has passed. It makes me feel so guilty. That evening when I went to see Sister Li, you had left by the time I returned, and soon after that you were arrested. I shall never forgive myself for failing you when you were in danger. I shall never be able to atone for this. But I shan't let remorse overwhelm me, and I shan't ask for your forgiveness. All I want to tell you is this: you have been arrested, but I have joined the ranks. And I believe that thousands of other young people like me are coming forward too. Of course, I am very inexperienced and can't in any way compare with you.

Having written so far, she stopped to reflect for a long while. Outside, the west wind was lashing the fallen leaves against the papered windows. It was late autumn and she was lightly clad. The cold wind blowing in through the cracks of the window made her shiver. At the same time the new exaltation in her heart helped her to forget the cold and her immediate danger, enabling her thoughts and pen to move rapidly.

My dearest and most respected friend, another thing I want to tell you is that I have just been through a small test. The reactionaries nearly destroyed me. But when the situation was at its most critical and I could find no way out, the Party — our great mother — reached out a helping hand. So in spite of my worry and distress I am very happy. It was the Party — through you — which showed me the way when I was lost and confused, and when danger and hidden pit-falls faced me on my way forward the Party came to my rescue again. . . . I am not out of danger yet, but I am confident that I shall soon be safe. I am so happy to think that now my life is like yours — full of high adventure.

Last of all, my dearest and most respected friend, I want to tell you something from the depths of my heart, something I never had the courage to say before. . . . Please don't laugh when I tell you that when you see this letter you will be looking at a truly candid heart. . . . Don't laugh at me, friend! I shall never forget you, never! No matter where you are, whether living or dead, no matter how the situation changes or what turn there may be for the worse, you will always live in my heart. When shall we meet again? Shall we be able to see each other again? . . . I live in hope for such a day to come. If it does come in my lifetime, how happy I shall be! Friend, may we really meet again! Take good care of yourself. Your unflinching resolution in the fight will always make you an inspiration to me.

When Tao-ching had finished this letter, she read it through again and again. And it seemed less like a letter she had written to Lu Chia-chuan than one that he had succeeded in sending to her through untold difficulties. Utterly absorbed in her reading, she was caught up by powerful emotions which made her forget her danger and distress.

"How shall I send it to him?" she asked herself. In the half-light of dawn, she fingered the letter and smiled. This was a letter that could never be delivered.

Chapter 29

Wang Hsiao-yen entered her father's study moody and silent, as if something were weighing on her mind.

"What's the matter, Hsiao-yen?" her mother asked anxiously. "Are you worrying about your lessons?"

"No!" She shook her head, frowning, her manner more grown-up than usual.

"What's the matter then? Tell us!"

Hsiao-yen rested her head on the desk without saying a word.

Professor Wang went over to her and raised her head, nodding affectionately.

"There's nothing you need keep from your father, child. Go on, what's troubling you?"

"Daddy, you've got to help me!" She looked in desperation from her father to her mother.

"Well, but what is it, child?"

"Tao-ching is in dreadful danger from those Kuomintang gangsters. I'm sorry for her because she's all on her own. We must find some way to help her, daddy!" Tears were falling from Hsiao-yen's eyes.

The professor and his wife stared at their daughter in astonishment as they digested this information.

"I've already promised our help. We mustn't fail her, daddy. I'm so angry to think of all she's had to go through!" Then she gave her parents a detailed account of Tao-ching's experiences. When she had finished, Professor Wang Hung-pin took off his glasses and brandished them in the air, banging his fist on the table.

"This is beyond all reason!" he cried. "Beyond all reason!" He paused at this point to master his agitation and presently continued in a calmer voice, "Well, Hsiao-yen, don't worry, and tell Tao-ching not to worry either. We shall find a way out for her somehow."

Hsiao-yen smiled. The plan she had made with Hsu Hui had proved effective after all. She knew that her aunt in Tinghsien southwest of Peiping was headmistress of a primary school which was short of teachers, and a job there seemed the ideal solution for Tao-ching's problems. Afraid to approach her father outright, she had beaten about the bush to arouse his indignation and sympathy. All turned out as she had wished, for Professor Wang, without waiting to be asked, immediately proposed that Tao-ching should be recommended to his sister. Later, at Hsiao-yen's request, he even went so far as to promise to see Tao-ching to the station to ensure her escape from Peiping. When all this was settled, however, he warned his daughter rather diffidently:

"Hsiao-yen, it's only right for us to help Lin Tao-ching, but in future don't interfere in other people's affairs. It's best to leave politics alone: the less we concern ourselves with it the better. Your duty is to study — nothing else."

Hsiao-yen nodded. "I agree, daddy. I don't understand the first thing about politics. It's Tao-ching I'm bothered about — I'm so sorry for her."

The next morning Hsiao-yen called on Tao-ching, taking with her a large basket of fruit. In contrast to her usual self-possessed manner, she called out before entering the room:

"What's the matter, Tao-ching? You haven't been to our house for two days to give lessons. Are you ill? Mother told me to come and have a look."

A lump came into Tao-ching's throat. The two friends embraced and for some time neither could speak. At last Hsiao-yen wiped her eyes and whispered:

"You must be ready by seven this evening to leave Peiping. You're going to Tinghsien to teach in my aunt's school. You'll find a man's suit hidden in this basket. It's been arranged that some students will call for Li Huai-ying and the others a little after six to go to a film. You can join their group dressed like a man and wearing a hat when they swarm out of the gate." Hsiao-yen said all this without pausing for breath. Fearing that she had not made herself clear, she stopped, looked out of the window and continued in a low voice, "It's just growing dark at seven, it should be quite easy for you to pass out unnoticed in the crowd and confusion. Mind you disguise yourself well! Hold your shoulders back so that you can pass for a boy. We two may not be aware of it, but Hsu Hui is pretty sure there are spies posted outside. She warns us to be very careful." She smiled at Tao-ching and drew a deep breath. Then, raising her voice, Hsiao-yen said, "Tao-ching, mother is so worried about you! She is very busy today, or she'd have come herself."

"There's nothing much the matter. I shall be better in a day or two," replied Tao-ching, knitting her brows. Then she whispered, "I'm so grateful to you and Hsu Hui for all your help. . . . But suppose something goes wrong and you're involved, what then?"

"Don't worry about that. Hsu Hui says there are risks we must take if we want results." Hsiao-yen had never been so excited before. She stroked Tao-ching's cold hands and, looking at her haggard face, continued in a loud, worried voice, "You do look bad! You can't have eaten for days. Go and have a meal at the small restaurant by the gate. Don't you really want anything?" Then she lowered her voice "Hsu Hui says you must eat. If you starve yourself, you'll fall ill. . . . Oh, my! I almost forgot something very important. When you get out this evening, go to the bend by the Red Building and you'll find a car waiting with my father and mother in it — ready to take you to the station."

Having said this, Hsiao-yen turned to go. But Tao-ching caught her by the arm, took from her pocket the letter she had written the previous night and begged her, "Please give this to Hsu Hui. Say I'll be most grateful if she can manage to get it to Lu Chia-chuan."

"Lu Chia-chuan?" Hsiao-yen repeated with surprise.

"Yes! Please don't forget, and take care not to lose it!"

Hsiao-yen smiled at her friend, and left without another word.

After she had gone, Tao-ching's mind was still disturbed by a number of problems. The basket of fruit, which was to assist her escape, was on a stool, but would the attempt prove successful? . . . The three days' grace given her by Hu Meng-an was drawing to an end. She could not bear to think of what would happen tomorrow — unless she managed to escape this evening. . . .

"What's on your mind, Tao-ching?" A low voice aroused her and, raising her head, she saw Tai Yu before her. He was wearing a shabby, drill student's uniform and carrying a small parcel wrapped in a newspaper. She stood up at once, putting the basket of fruit under the table to clear the stool for him.

"I was hoping you'd come, Old Tai. I'm so glad to see you!"

Tao-ching's doubts of the previous day put her a little on her guard towards Tai Yu but her caution was counterbalanced by her need for a friend. She shook hands with him warmly and cordially offered him a seat.

After seating himself, Tai Yu lit a cigarette and watched her for a moment before speaking. As this was his habit, Tao-ching attached no special importance to it.

"How have you been getting along these days? Are you still teaching?"

"Well. . . ." A little uneasy, she wondered whether to tell him of the latest developments, but before she had made up her mind, lighting another cigarette he went on:

"You're not looking very well. Have you been ill?"

"No, but I've had the most horrible experience," she answered. She felt it was wrong to keep her troubles from a fellow revolutionary who showed concern, even though his actions were somewhat questionable.

"What happened?" asked Tai Yu sympathetically, peering short-sightedly at her.

Thereupon she gave him a brief account of her arrest and Hu Meng-an's persecution. Engrossed with her preparations for that evening, she was in no mood to talk at any great length.

"Why, that's incredible!" exclaimed Tai Yu as he stared at her. "That man's the limit. Those reactionaries have no sense of shame."

"What do you think I should do, Old Tai? He gave me three days — and two have now gone."

Tai Yu looked thoughtfully at the floor for a while. Then, tapping the table in a worried manner, he asked, "What plans have you made to get out of this fix, Tao-ching? So far as I can see, your position is really serious."

"Old Tai. . . ." She was on the point of telling him Hsu Hui's plan, when her friend's injunction to absolute secrecy made her decide against it. "I'm at my wit's end." She changed her tone. "I've been so worried that for three days I've eaten nothing."

"Is that so?" He raised his head and spoke gravely. "Well, you must think of a way out — has it occurred to you to run away?"

"No. I've nowhere to go, and even if I had I wouldn't know how to escape. Don't you realize that there are spies outside the gate? I dare not go out. For several days I haven't gone to give lessons."

Tai Yu listened without much show of interest. With his head bent, he was puffing at his cigarette and seemed to be turning something over in his mind. For some minutes he said nothing.

Tao-ching fidgeted with a pencil on the table, conscious of exasperation and disappointment. Why hadn't he offered to help as Hsu Hui had done? Why was he so impassive? She watched him in silence. Presently he stood up, flicked some dust from his clothes and said softly:

"Don't worry, Tao-ching. Deal with that fellow Hu as you think fit. I'm going back to find some way to help you. When I have something definite, I'll come and let you know."

"Thank you," said Tao-ching coldly, with a feeling of distress.

Tai Yu shook her icy hand, then turned and went out of the courtyard.

"Maybe he will find some way out for me — but too late." She sat on her bed musing, forgetting her projected escape until the sight of the basket of fruit reminded her that she must start getting ready.

She roused herself at once and took out the Western suit. It was now past four o'clock, and less than three hours to the time set by Hsiao-yen. Tao-ching was holding the suit up against herself when her brother called again. He looked scared and dejected. His hair was tousled, his clothes crumpled and his tie was missing. Without noticing what his sister was putting in her case or whether the chair was clean or not, he sat down and fixed reddened eyes on Tao-ching.

"Sister, I've been arrested," he said. "You must save me!"

"What!" Tao-ching started. "You arrested too?"

"It's true. Just two hours after I'd left you, I was grabbed. The police beat me up, saying that both you and I are Communists instigating a riot. Could anything be more unjust!" He pulled out his handkerchief to wipe his tears. "Save me, sister! You're the only one who can save me!"

"How can *I* save you?"

Tao-feng lowered his head as he wiped his eyes and stammered:

"At first I thought they were going to beat me to death, but in the nick of time a Mr. Hu turned up and saved my life. He was very kind. He said he knew you and you knew how to save me. So he's sent me here."

Tao-ching bent her head in thought for a few moments. Hsu Hui's advice and the bitter lesson she had learned from her first meeting with her brother made her more alert. This time she neither lectured Tao-feng nor lashed out at Hu Meng-an. After a moment's silence she raised her head and said pleasantly:

"Don't be upset, brother. So Mr. Hu asked me to save you? Of course I must do my best to help my brother, but. . . ."

"But what?" he demanded in astonished delight.

"But Mr. Hu is too impatient, too rough and rude. The day before yesterday he came to threaten me with his pistol, and for two days his spies have been watching me. I've been too frightened and disturbed to eat or sleep. If his attitude changes, then perhaps I might. . . ." She broke off with a smile.

The anxiety on Tao-feng's face vanished. He took her arm and pressed it eagerly. "Thank you, sister! And thank you on Ling-ling's behalf too. You are really very good. Did you say Mr. Hu was rough and rude? In my opinion he's extremely pleasant." With a sly smile he whispered into her ear, "He seems to be very much in love — and he's very rich."

Tao-ching flushed crimson. She did her best, however, to suppress her anger and, shaking her head, simply answered, "Don't talk nonsense! He's no good. . . . But tell me, how does he expect me to save you?"

"Well, he said if you'd just agree. . . . He said he'd spoken to you and you'd understand. I'm sure if only you'll be kind to him, he'll be very pleased."

"How can I agree?" murmured Tao-ching in a bewildered voice. "He gave me three days to answer and there's still more than one day left before the time's up, so I must think it over carefully. Go and tell him that if he keeps on bringing pressure to bear and sending spies to watch me, I shall certainly give him a flat refusal; but if he shows some respect and is nice to me, I'll give him a proper answer the day after tomorrow."

"What will your answer be?" Tao-feng sounded worried again. "For my sake, sister, for the sake of our parents whose only son I am, as well as for your own, agree to what he asks!"

"Don't you worry." She edged him towards the door. "After all, I don't want you to suffer and I've my own safety to think of too. . . . Just go and tell him what I said."

"Thanks, sister, and thanks from Ling-ling too! I'll go at once and tell Mr. Hu that you'll give him an answer the day

after tomorrow." With an imploring smile he bowed and left the room.

"Don't worry, now!" She saw him to the gate where three rickshas were waiting. Two plain-clothes men, one on either side, roughly pushed him on the middle ricksha and they all set off together. As Tao-ching stood at the gate, her brother looked back at her with eyes like those of a lamb being led to the slaughter. She was touched and began to pity the innocent lad. She went back to her room with a heavy heart. After a few minutes' thought, she sprang up with a determined look on her face and urged herself, "Fight on! No more hesitation!" Then she heard a flurry of footsteps in the courtyard, followed by bursts of laughter. Visitors were gathering in all her neighbours' rooms. The students talked and laughed at the top of their voices and, in the dusk, the hostel became suddenly lively.

Tao-ching bolted the door and hastily changed her clothes, putting on as many of her own garments as possible under a shirt and trousers. Then she vigorously combed up her hair. At any moment now, it should strike seven. Her heart beat faster and faster.

PART II

Chapter 1

With the help of Professor Wang and his wife, Tao-ching caught a train to Tinghsien, where she became a teacher in a primary school outside the East Gate. Her enthusiasm and hard work made her popular with the children and even the strict headmistress, Hsiao-yen's aunt Wang Yen-wen, had nothing but praise for this young teacher who was recommended by her brother.

Tao-ching still had a sense of futility. She missed Peiping more and more and hankered after a life of heroic adventure. She often dreamed of an unexpected visit from Lu Chia-chuan, or some other revolutionary. Time slipped by without any word from these friends whom she held in such high esteem, and she had no way of finding out their whereabouts. Though she kept up her correspondence with Hsu Hui, drawing inspiration and encouragement from her letters, she remained unsatified, feeling that something important in life was missing.

So several months passed.

One day in spring, she received a letter from Hsu Hui telling her to expect a visit from a man named Chiang Hua, and asking her to find him a job in Tinghsien. Tao-ching's delight knew no bounds. She read the letter, put it on her desk and smiled. A few minutes later, she re-read it and smiled again. Though the man was not Lu Chia-chuan, nor even an old acquaintance, she was positive that he must be one of them — a revolutionary. The letter still in her hand, she gave free play to her imagination. Would he look anything like Lu Chia-chuan or Hsu Ning? . . . She flushed when she realized how her thoughts were wandering. Her fancy ran away with her all too often.

Soon, however, excitement gave way to anxiety. Hsu Hui had asked her to find Chiang Hua a job. But how? To whom should she go? This problem kept her awake all night, and first thing the next morning she went to the headmistress and told her:

"A cousin of mine has had to give up his studies, Miss Wang. He's coming here and wants me to find him a job. Can you possibly help?"

Rather taken aback, Wang Yen-wen shook her head dubiously and said with a smile:

"Term started long ago, so there's no vacancy here . . . I never knew you had a cousin. Is he really your cousin?"

The headmistress, a spinster over forty, was always quick to scent a romance.

Tao-ching gave an embarrassed laugh.

"Don't make fun of me, Miss Wang! I need your help. His name is Chiang Hua, and he's a student of Peking University. Recently his parents tried to force him to marry a girl he'd never seen. He refused and broke with his family, so he's had to leave the university to find work. You've a kind heart, Miss Wang, and you know lots of people in Tinghsien. Do lend him a helping hand!" Her face flushed and her heart beat fast, as she told this carefully prepared tale.

The word "marry" and Tao-ching's eagerness convinced the headmistress that this young man must be her sweetheart. She paused for a second, then nodded.

"Be patient, Tao-ching. We'll try to find something when he comes. When will he be here?"

"Quite soon. Then you will help, won't you?" Tao-ching laughed for joy and gratefully clasped the elder woman's hand. "You have such a kind heart, aunty!"

"Ah, you young people. . . ." The prudent, timorous headmistress looked searchingly into Tao-ching's tender face. Then her soft voice, which was tinged with admiration, trailed away.

After school that afternoon, Tao-ching was too restless to stay indoors. She went to the station outside the West Gate to meet Chiang Hua, not realizing her folly until she was there. She would not be able to recognize the expected guest

even if he came! Back she went, feeling rather dejected.

One evening about a week later, the janitor came to tell her that a Mr. Chiang wanted to see her. Running out to meet him, she saw a tall, well-built young man with a dark complexion standing by the gate. He was wearing an old felt hat and a grey cotton suit buttoned up to the neck, and looked like a college student of simple tastes, or a clerk in some government office. After making sure that no one else was near, she asked with a blush:

"Your name, please? And where are you from?"

"I'm Chiang Hua." He spoke softly, nodding. "Hsu Hui sent me."

Taking his suit-case, Tao-ching led him to her room. Once inside, she closed the door and whispered to him as if they were old friends:

"Remember, you're my cousin, a student from Peking University. Don't forget that when you're talking to other people. Our stories must agree, you know!"

Chiang Hua nodded casually and sat down with a smile. Leaning against her desk, Tao-ching looked at him expectantly. He seemed rather an odd fellow, and just sat there calmly, watching her in friendly silence. Tao-ching was too embarrassed to make conversation, and Chiang Hua did not begin to talk for some time. His voice was low and deep, and he had a northern accent.

"How did you come to know Hsu Hui? How long have you been here?"

Tao-ching, aware that he wanted to know something of her background, told him in detail how she had come to Tinghsien. She spoke rapidly, raising her voice inadvertently. He signed to her to lower it, and she complied with a smile. She told him how anxiously she had waited for him, and that she had asked Miss Wang to find him a job. Finally she asked if he had seen Hsu Hui before leaving Peiping.

"Thank you for all the trouble you have taken," he said. "Look, I've brought you a letter." He took it from his pocket and gave it to her. "Hsu Hui wrote this to tell you all about me." He spoke simply and to the point, and his manner was sincere and natural.

Tao-ching opened it, wondering why he hadn't given her the letter before. After reading it her face was radiant.

"I'm so glad you've come! You don't know how I've been longing, every minute of the day, for someone to get in touch with me. . . . And now Hsu Hui's sent you!"

Looking up at Tao-ching's eager, excited face, Chiang Hua concealed his surprise and bluntly said, "Have you had your supper? I haven't."

"Oh, dear! How thoughtless of me! I was so excited that I neglected you. We've had ours already, but that's no excuse for not remembering your needs. Wait a second, I will fetch you something to drink and ask the janitor to buy a snack of some sort."

She hurried out, and soon returned with a pot of hot tea. She poured him out a cup, saying, "You must be thirsty."

Chiang Hua drained the cup in a few gulps. After pouring out another cup of tea for him, Tao-ching sat down by the table and, her head a little to one side, said:

"What made you come here? Where were you working before?"

Just then the janitor came in with some pastries, smoked chicken, sausages and stewed pork. When spread out, they covered more than half the table.

"Why did you buy so much?" asked Chiang Hua when the man had gone.

"You must be very hungry. Just help yourself. Tinghsien is famous for its pastries and smoked chicken, but I don't think that they really live up to their reputation." Tao-ching was doing her best to make him feel at home.

"Tell me, Chiang, did you see Hsu Hui before you left? How is Hsu Hui getting on, Chiang?"

In her excitement she pelted him with questions. But he simply shook his head and said with a smile:

"No, not 'Chiang' but 'Cousin'."

He did not need to say more. She recognized the need for caution, gave a penitent laugh and said, "How stupid of me!"

It was dark when the meal was over, Tao-ching lit a paraffin lamp in her small room and they sat down for a long talk.

"How are things going in this school?" asked Chiang Hua.

Tao-ching thought a little, then said, "I don't really know where to begin. But first let me tell you that the headmistress, Wang Yen-wen, is the aunt of my friend Wang Hsiao-yen. She's a Christian, more than forty, and she's never married. There are nine teachers in all. Three of them, counting myself, are women."

"Can you tell me something about their outlook and life? Good, bad or indifferent?"

Tao-ching was taken by surprise, but she answered cheerfully, "Well, I'd say that most of them, including the two in the administrative office, are worried about the country and dissatisfied with the present corrupt regime, but all they do is complain. Two or three are so muddle-headed that eating, teaching, sleeping and playing mahjong make up the whole of their life. As for the two women, one thinks of nothing else but earning enough to support her invalid husband who's lost his job, and the other of marrying a man rich enough to support her."

"Haven't you found one decent person here?" Chiang Hua tilted his head and grinned.

"There's one who's better than the rest." Tao-ching's eyes were half closed and her face wore a look of mischief. "And there's one who is quite horrible!"

"Tell me about them." Chiang Hua was smiling.

"All right." Tao-ching smiled too. "The horrible one is a mountain of fat called Wu Yu-tien, with bushy eyebrows which nearly meet over his nose. His head shakes and quivers when he talks. The most hateful thing about him is the way he buzzes round the women teachers. . . ." Chiang Hua laughed at that, and she could not help joining in. "He's a member of the Kuomintang and rotten right through. He often goes to the Kuomintang headquarters in the county town."

Chiang Hua's interest was aroused. "Have you watched him carefully? Is he up to anything in the school?"

She shook her head. "Not that I know."

"All right. What about the one who's better than the rest?"

"That's Chao Yu-ching, who used to study at the Second Normal School in Paoting. He's young and enthusiastic and I get on quite well with him. He took part in the students' movement in the Normal School. He's even told me, in confidence, that he longs to join the Communist Party. . . ."

"And you told him you felt the same way. Right?" Chiang Hua grinned.

"You're a good guesser!" Tao-ching blushed. "We've often talked about our ideals, about revolution — in secret, of course."

Chiang Hua made no comment. Glancing at Tao-ching, he picked up some of the exercise books on her desk and leafed through them, then half jokingly asked:

"Well, do you think you can trust me?"

"Of course! Why not?"

Chiang Hua nodded. Putting down the exercise books, he changed the subject. "Tell me something about the students."

He proceeded to question her in detail about the school children, their number and family backgrounds. How many came from peasant families? How many from the working class? Were there any children whose parents were government officials? Were their families well off or not? . . . She wondered why he was asking all these questions, but gave him all the information she had, although it was very limited. It was some time before she had a chance to interrogate him.

"Why do you want to work in Tinghsien? Where did you come from?"

"I've no fixed address." Chiang Hua's smile made it impossible to doubt him. He skilfully steered the conversation back to Tao-ching. "Since we're going to be friends, do you mind telling me something about what you've done in the past and what you want to do in future?"

"Certainly!" She looked grave, and talked thoughtfully and slowly. "I'm the daughter of a landlord and a peasant woman. So I've white bones as well as black."* Stealing a glance at Chiang Hua to make sure that he was not laughing, she continued, "I used to be sentimental, easily depressed and sick of life. I loathed and hated everything in the world, because my father and stepmother treated me badly. I didn't know how to rebel against all that I hated. That's how it was with me until I met a very good man, the best man I know, who advised me what road to take, showed me how to rebel against this rotten society, and how to see people and things from a class standpoint. That's when. . . . I think I can say it was only then that the white-boned part of me began to shrink. I began to understand the right path to follow. But it isn't easy to keep to that path, and I often lose my way." Tao-ching stopped short, gazing anxiously at Chiang Hua as if she had left much unsaid.

For a long time he remained silent, his thoughtful eyes looking at her, seeming to say, "Yes, my girl, you've been telling the truth."

Chapter 2

The flowers of May
Are blooming far and wide,
Across the land
With blood of patriots dyed;
Bravely they fought
To save our land from shame;
Their dauntless fight
Has won them deathless fame.

Though late to bed that night, Tao-ching rose the next morning at dawn. Assuming that Chiang Hua was still asleep, she strolled alone, singing, through the fields not far from the school. By a solitary grave she stopped to sing *The Flowers*

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* According to Russian folklore, the aristocracy had white bones, the serfs and labouring people black ones.

of May, and the song turned her thoughts to Lu Chia-chuan. Since Chiang Hua's coming, for some reason or other, she had kept drawing comparisons between the two of them, and her heart began to ache again. Seeking relief from her tormenting thoughts, she picked some flowers. A light morning breeze was blowing over the fields that showed signs of the coming of spring; and the cool, fresh air was filled with fragrance. While gathering wild orchids, she took comfort from the thought of the new significance and purpose that Chiang Hua might bring into her life.

Tao-ching hurried back to the school with a large bunch of orchids and a few sprigs of lilac. She was wearing a blue gown, light blue cardigan, white shoes and stockings; and her white silk scarf was an admirable foil to her fair face and delicate features. Like the spring morning, both in appearance and spirit, she was the very embodiment of youth. Back in her room she put the flowers in two glass vases, and took one of them to the west wing where Chiang Hua was staying. She stepped lightly in order not to wake him. Peeping through the door, which was ajar, she saw that he was up and poring over a book. When he turned and saw her standing outside, her hands behind her back, he stood up and said:

"Why don't you come in? What have you got there?"

"You may not like it. But. . . ." Tao-ching shyly put the vase on a table and spoke timidly, almost guiltily. "You're sure to laugh, but I'm very fond of flowers. Here are some I've just picked in the fields."

To her surprise, Chiang Hua took the vase, smelled the flowers and nodded approval. "What a delicious scent!" he said. "Everyone likes what is beautiful. Why shouldn't I?" Putting the vase down again, he turned to Tao-ching. "Do you know your way about the town? I want to call on a friend."

"You want to go out? But breakfast will be ready very soon. I'll go with you after breakfast and show you the way."

"No, there's no need. You have your classes to attend to. I'll go by myself." After a minute's thought, he added with a smile, "There's one thing for which you must be mentally

prepared; how are other people going to view our relationship?"

Tao-ching flushed, but replied without any hesitation:

"What does that matter? I don't care what they think. Don't you worry!"

"That's splendid, then. That will make it easier for us to have some good talks. I'd like to stay here for a few days. Will that be all right?"

"That will be fine! I'll go now to remind Miss Wang of her promise to find you a job."

"Good."

The teachers, seeing how intimate Tao-ching was with her visitor, took it for granted that Chiang Hua was her sweetheart. They got together in twos and threes to gossip about it in whispers. At lunch, fat Wu Yu-tien, focussing prominent eyes on Tao-ching, asked:

"Miss Lin, why do so many lovers in China call themselves cousins instead of telling the truth?"

The teachers in the room burst into laughter. Wu himself waited solemnly for Tao-ching's answer, his thick, black eyebrows puckered.

Tao-ching had been expecting some such attack, and primed by Chiang Hua earlier that morning, she was ready with an answer. Without troubling to put down her steamed rool, she calmly said:

"I should have thought that the reason was plain enough. It's because the influence of feudalism is still too strong for the course of true love to run smooth. If young people find it awkward to call themselves sweethearts, they naturally describe themselves as cousins."

Wu Yu-tien's eyes bulged at this unexpected answer.

"How about you two, then?" he challenged, looking from Chiang Hua to Tao-ching with a swing of his head. "Cousins? Sweethearts? Or both at once?"

A roar of laughter burst out in the dining-room.

"Both at once," retorted Tao-ching as the laughter subsided.

Tao-ching's detachment and firmness, the smiling composure of Chiang Hua, and the comic sight of Wu's swivelling head and pompous solemnity set the whole room laughing even louder. Putting down their chopsticks, the two women teachers almost doubled up with mirth. The headmistress, conscious of a breach of manners, rapped the table with her chopsticks and called in a reedy voice:

"The joke's gone far enough, friends! Mr. Chiang is a guest. We're not being very polite. . . . Please don't be offended, Mr. Chiang. We all treat Tao-ching like a younger sister, like one of the family."

"Hear, hear! No more of your jokes now, Mr. Wu!"

"Mr. Wu mustn't be such a spoil-sport!"

In the general attack on Wu, the subject was dismissed.

After lunch, Chiang Hua followed Tao-ching into her room. Once inside, the girl gave vent to her indignation.

"How angry you must feel! . . . They were so rude!"

"Why should I mind?" he asked with a smile. "You expect that sort of behaviour from philistines. You did well to react so calmly. All right, let's go on with our acting so that we'll not disappoint them!" He burst out laughing, and Tao-ching laughed too, till the tears came into her eyes.

Chiang Hua went out that afternoon and did not return till about nine o'clock. Tao-ching, who was sitting near the lamp, was on the point of asking how he had spent the day; but he took the initiative, and started to discuss revolutionary theory, and not questions about school or daily life.

"Tao-ching, let's talk about something different this evening. Do you know what the fundamental problem of the Chinese revolution is today?"

Tao-ching stared at him, completely at a loss.

"Never mind, let's take something else," he said after a pause. "The North Chahar Anti-Japanese Allied Army has been defeated, but what influence has it had on the Movement for Resistance and National Salvation? And along what lines do you think the Chinese revolution will develop?"

Pursing her lips, Tao-ching fidgeted with her handkerchief. She thought for a while but could not answer.

She had always prided herself on having read many books.

The three principles of dialectics, the categories and stages of capitalism, the theory of the inevitable doom of imperialism and the ultimate triumph of communism — she had studied all this and much more. But Chiang Hua's questions about specific problems and the fundamental nature of the Chinese revolution baffled her. She racked her brains for a good answer. Now she had to pay the penalty, however, for not reading the papers carefully and for not making a better study of practical problems. The more she tried to think, the more confused she grew. She felt that any answer she might give would be worse than useless. So after a painful silence, during which she felt like a backward child singled out for attention by the teacher, she said hesitantly, watching Chiang Hua's face:

"I've thought hard, but still I can't answer. You've shown me up. . . . Oh, dear! How could I ignore such problems all this time?"

Seeing how flustered and naive she was, Chiang Hua laughed in spite of himself.

"All right, then, let me ask you another question. Do you think China can defeat Japan?"

"Of course!" This time Tao-ching was ready with her answer, which she proceeded to state systematically. "In the first place, four hundred million Chinese won't submit to being slaves with no country of their own. In the second place, China is big, rich in natural resources, and has an immense population; whereas Japan is small, with far fewer people, and can't win the war just because she has better weapons. In the third place. . . ." She bit her lip and thought for a moment. "In the third place, the Communists and all progressives are firmly determined to resist Japan; and, what's more, the Communist Party has joined the anti-Japanese united front. Am I right, Chiang Hua?"

Chiang Hua sat there in silence, while Tao-ching stood, eagerly waiting for his reply. At last he said slowly:

"Your first two arguments are all right, but there's something wrong with the third. Without the leadership of the Communist Party, the Chinese revolution can never succeed! It's the same with the anti-Japanese war: the Party must not only join in, but must lead it. Do you understand what leadership means, Tao-ching?"

Chiang Hua's thoughtful eyes were glowing, and Tao-ching, who had been hanging on his every word, began to feel a deep respect for him. She was conscious of a sudden exhilaration. She filled his cup, drank some more water herself, and then leaned over the desk fixing him with her eyes as she said:

"I am so glad you came, Chiang Hua! I know far too little, and the few ideas I have are too superficial. . . . From now on you must give me more help! What college did you graduate from? I expect you've been doing revolutionary work for years, haven't you?"

"I'm not a college graduate. It would be more accurate to call me a worker."

"What! You a worker? Surely not!"

"Yes, a worker." He smiled broadly. "Only a short time ago I was working in a coal-mine."

Tao-ching shook her head incredulously.

"But you don't look like a worker. You know so much. . . . I've assumed all the time you were a college graduate."

Chiang Hua chuckled.

"Why, do you think all workers are clumsy and ignorant? There's no reason why they should be!"

Tao-ching was quite dumbfounded. She now felt even more abashed and ashamed than when she had been unable to answer his questions. Fingering the hem of her gown, she said in a low voice:

"In theory, I know the workers are able and strong, but in my heart. . . . The truth is, I still believe that old saying, 'Learning stands above all else.' Today I'm beginning to see myself as I am — an embroidered pillow stuffed with straw."

Chiang chuckled but made no comment, till Tao-ching, quite nonplussed, was forced to laugh too. Then he put a new question to her:

"Tell me, Tao-ching, are you in touch with any of your students' parents — the workers and peasants, I mean?"

"No, I'm not," admitted Tao-ching, somewhat ill at ease. "It's never occurred to me that I should contact them. I spend all my spare time reading."

Toying with a ruler, he watched her intently.

"From now on, through your students, I'd like you to get into touch with some workers and peasants. They'll do you a lot of good. They're different from the people you know, and far more interesting." He spoke so naturally and pleasantly that Tao-ching did not feel she was being lectured.

"You're right," she said. "I have sometimes felt I'd like to talk with them, but I didn't know what to say — we seemed to have so little in common."

Chiang Hua began to pace the room. Then he opened the door to peer into the pitch-dark courtyard. He closed the door again, looked at the picture of Tolstoy on the wall for a while, and then turned back to Tao-ching with a smile.

"Tao-ching, I think your ideas about revolution are altogether too visionary and idealistic. You're like a romantic poet. . . . What you need is more contact with the labouring people. They have a great fund of knowledge about fuel, rice, oil and salt, the way to bring up children, and all the other affairs of everyday life. They are very practical. And you badly lack this practical spirit."

Tao-ching looked up at him in silence. Not knowing whether she agreed or not, he bid her goodnight and left.

Chiang Hua was allowed to stay in the school for the time being. He used to go out during the daytime when Tao-ching was teaching and return after dusk, to spend most evenings questioning her and helping her to analyse various problems. Occasionally, when they were conferring in whispers, some inquisitive colleague would open the door and step in. Then Chiang Hua would rise to his feet, smiling, and Tao-ching would stand quietly by his side, her face radiant with a happiness which she made no attempt to conceal.

"Ah, head over heels in love!" After the uninvited guest withdrew, having had his bit of fun, they would resume their conversation.

Once Tao-ching could not help saying, "Chiang Hua, I've asked you so often about your past life and reason for coming here, yet you've never told me anything."

"I came here to find a job, that's all. My past life has been quite ordinary. It's not worth talking about. Maybe I'll tell you something about it later."

Tao-ching smiled helplessly. She could see that Chiang Hua was down-to-earth, dynamic and determined. She guessed that he had an important revolutionary task, and longed to know what it was and who he was, but all her questions on these points went unanswered, although he was invariably kind and friendly to her.

One evening he failed to come back at his usual hour. Tao-ching waited up till midnight, then went to bed too worried to sleep. Despite Chiang Hua's reticence, she had an inkling of what he was doing, and this always made her uneasy during his absence. It was well past midnight before she heard a tapping on her window and a low husky voice called her name.

She jumped out of bed, turned up the lamp and opened the door.

Chiang Hua slipped in, dressed like a peasant in ragged clothes and spattered with mud.

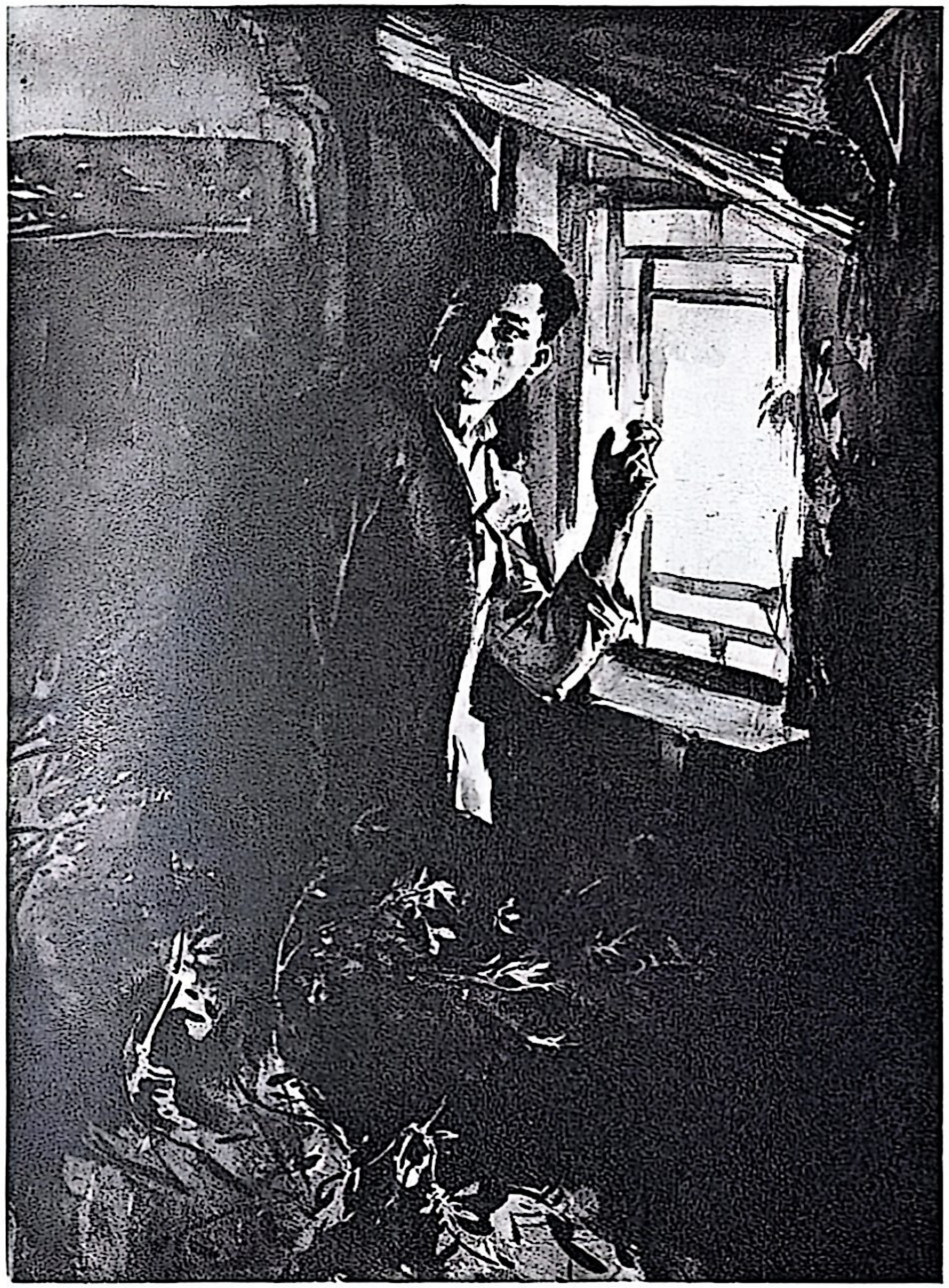
In the dim light he looked deathly pale as he stood motionless for a few seconds, rooted to the ground like some sturdy tree.

Her heart pounded as she stared at him aghast.

"There's been some trouble, Tao-ching. I must leave at once."

His face contracted, as if each word caused him pain. Sinking down on a chair, his breath coming in short gasps, he continued, "I'd hoped to stay here longer. It's a pity that it isn't possible. . . . Please turn the lamp as low as you can."

Holding her breath, Tao-ching did as she was told. Then she tiptoed to Chiang Hua's side to look at him closely. The pale moonlight streaming in through the window suddenly revealed a big red stain on his right shoulder and right arm. She realized with horror that it was blood!



"Are you wounded?" Her voice was low and tremulous. "What happened? Who did this?"

"Who do you think?" Chiang Hua leaned heavily against the chair till he gradually recovered his usual composure. "Can you give me some cloth to bandage this up?" he asked.

She hurriedly found a piece of cloth, but her offer of assistance was refused. With his teeth and a few deft movements of his left hand, he swathed his right arm. Then he told her to tie the bandage firmly in place. The cloth was almost immediately soaked with blood.

"Tao-ching, I'm sorry I've had so little time to discuss your work with you." His voice was low and weak. "We've hardly had any serious talks these last few days. I didn't know that things would move so quickly. . . . Well, are you willing to do some practical work?"

"Of course! But tell me, Chiang Hua. . . ." This question had been on her mind for days, but she tried to calm her throbbing heart as she asked:

"Tell me — are you a Communist?"

"Why do you ask me?"

"I, I — will you sponsor me if I ask to join the Party?"

Chiang Hua was sitting with his head against the wall, his eyes closed in pain. He now opened them to look at Tao-ching and there was a faint smile on his pallid face.

"I think you know what is meant by a 'test'. You've seen from your own experience what the Party and the revolution are; but the revolution must in turn put you to the test. . . . If you're strong enough, the Party will open its door to you." He coughed and rested his head on the table for a while. Then with brotherly concern and affection, he said, "Don't be disappointed! You will have a chance to join the Party later on. For the present, you must do some practical work. After I've gone, I want you to do revolutionary work among your pupils and colleagues, and get into touch with some of the children's parents. Let's discuss how you should go about it."

Their talk ended just before dawn, when Chiang Hua struggled to his feet and looked through the window. It was already becoming light in the east. His last advice to her was: "Be bold but cautious. Do your best to win over your colleagues. I'm sure you will do good work. Well, I must be off before daybreak. Get me my suit-case, will you? I must change my clothes."

In fearful agitation, Tao-ching watched him take off his blood-stained clothes, roll them up, wash his face with one hand, and then calmly pack his things.

"Are you really going? Your arm's still bleeding."

"It doesn't matter." His bloodless lips broke into a faint smile. "At a meeting last night we were suddenly surrounded by the county security corps. I was hit while dashing out. . . . But it's nothing serious. Now things are too hot for me here. I must move on."

"Will you come back?" A wistful smile was on her lips.

"Can't say for certain. But we can always find means to keep in touch. Someone may come to see you. I have an aunt, a kindly soul, who lives in the neighbourhood. Perhaps she will call on you. . . . All right, you may see me off. Let's go by the main gate and say we're catching a train." Chiang Hua, dressed like an office worker again, picked up his hat. Tao-ching carried his suit-case for him, and they went out together.

It was dawn. A few lingering stars were still twinkling in the western sky, and outside the city all was quiet. As they walked over the dewy grass in the freshness of the morning, Chiang Hua was silent, and Tao-ching was weighed down by gloom. She had innumerable questions to raise, but could not ask them now.

"How strong and brave he is! And how patient in teaching others!" A glance at Chiang Hua showed that his face, though still pale, was perfectly composed and serene. "Is he oblivious of pain?" she wondered. Her heart aching, she could not refrain from asking him, "Does it hurt? You ought to have rested a few days with me."

He shook his head and strode on in silence. At a cross-road he stopped and said:

"Tao-ching, don't be so soft-hearted — the struggle is ruthless. You must go back now."

"What is your real name, Chiang Hua? Can't you just tell me that?"

"Li Meng-yu! Go back now, I must be off. Goodbye!" He walked away down the highway, giving her no chance to question him further.

"Is he the Li Meng-yu who led the Peking University students when they went to Nanking to stage demonstrations? . . ." She stood beneath a willow, her eyes following his tall, broad figure until it was swallowed up in the morning mist. Then she bowed her head, and said as if murmuring a prayer:

"Good luck to you, comrade! . . . Do come back again! . . ."

Chapter 3

So Chiang Hua was Li Meng-yu, a student of Peking University. But why should a college student call himself a worker? This question puzzled Tao-ching.

Li Meng-yu was a native of Honan. After graduating from primary school at thirteen, he had been taken by his father to Shanghai to become an apprentice in a printing house. He worked by day and attended school in the evenings. Here he came into contact with the Communists, joined the Communist Youth League, and later the Party. Then he studied in the high school affiliated to the University of Shanghai, supporting himself by part-time work, and at the same time leading the workers' struggle. When the revolution of 1924-27 failed and the Kuomintang reactionaries began to massacre workers and revolutionaries, he fled to avoid arrest. Losing contact with the Party and unable to remain in Shanghai, he went to Peiping to live with an uncle, also a worker in a printing house. He had hoped to renew his connection with the Party in Peiping and also get a job, but this proved more difficult than expected, and in his dilemma he hit on the idea of going to college. During the daytime he did odd jobs at a small bazaar outside Chien Men, earning enough for his board. At night he sat up, reading, in a corner of his uncle's single room. He studied so hard that in less than five months he was ready to enter college. With a faked high-school diploma, he took the entrance examination and passed, and then enrolled in the Philosophy Department of Peking University. Before that, however, he had re-established contact with the Party and been given the task of leading the students' movement. These were the reasons why he considered himself first and foremost a worker.

When the students returned after holding demonstrations in Nanking, Li Meng-yu could not stay at the university. The Party sent him to Tangshan in eastern Hopei, where he worked as a miner for more than a year and helped to direct the big strike in Tangshan's five collieries. When the Anti-Japanese Allied Army was formed, he went to Changchiakou and became a battalion commander. Following the army's defeat, he returned to Peiping, got in touch with the Hopei Provincial Committee of the Party and was put in charge of the peasant movement in Paoting. At that time the peasants of the region, driven to desperation by the landlords and usurers, the endless taxes and levics, and the rapid bankruptcy of the rural economy, were secretly preparing under Party leadership to resist. Before Tao-ching came to Tinghsien, Chiang Hua, as secretary of the Party committee of the counties around Tinghsien, was already carrying out underground activities there. To put the enemy off the scent, he got into touch with Tao-ching, through Hsu Hui, and stayed under cover at her school while organizing an armed uprising in the second detachment of the Tinghsien Security Corps. The villagers, living on both banks of the Tangho, often saw him cycle up and down selling stationery. Sometimes, disguised as a peasant, he would converse with country folk about the hardness of their common lot and the crushing burden of extortionate taxes and levies. He changed his disguise and occupation so often that he was able to work in Tinghsien for more than half a year without being discovered.

The revolutionary bodies in that area gained strength with every passing day.

The night that Tao-ching sat up so late for him, pale moonlight lay hazily over the winding Tangho, and reeds in a nearby swamp swayed in the chilly wind. The late spring night was still but for the rustling of the reeds, when a score of men in tattered army uniforms and the shabby clothes of peasants gathered there. They were Party members or members of the Communist Youth League who had succeeded in joining the local security corps. Some stood by the dyke with rifles in their hands, others, armed in the same way, squatted in the icy mud. Two young sentinels marched up and down the moonlit dyke, guns at the ready.

The men included Chiang Hua and Tai Yu, who had arrived two days previously as a representative of the Party Committee of Paoting. They were meeting to discuss how to strengthen the Party in this region and organize a revolt in the security corps — the landlord's militia. Both were dressed as peasants: Chiang Hua in a black homespun jacket and shabby straw hat; Tai Yu, still wearing his spectacles, also dressed in black. They squatted in the mud with the others.

Chiang Hua opened the meeting by calling for a report on public feeling and on those present to voice their opinions on this matter.

For a time no one spoke, though the moonlight, shining over the sparse reeds, showed the tension and excitement on their faces. Years of hardship had left wringkles on many foreheads, and the men's eyes gleamed with hatred and indignation.

The short silence seemed of long duration. Then a man about thirty spoke in a low voice charged with bitterness.

"Let's not waste time! How are we to get things started? We've had more than we can stand here. Not a catty of grain was gathered because of the flood, but the landlords still expect rent and free services. . . . And the money-lenders have grabbed at this chance to suck the marrow from our bones. One peck of corn borrowed now means two pecks of wheat to be paid back after the summer, no matter whether the next harvest's good or bad. Our wives and children will starve. . . ."

"We Party members are all for it," said Li Lo-kuei, the strong, thick-set secretary of the district Party committee, who was also a detachment leader in the security corps. "Give them hell! We must get the security corps in the different villages to take action together. After we've struck and cleaned up that scum, we'll withdraw into the mountains. . . . Once a soviet is set up here in North China, like those down in Kiangsi, our peasants too will be able to settle scores with the landlords and divide up their hoarded grain. . . . We'll be able to straighten our backs!" Li trained his shrewd, narrow eyes on the young men standing near him. Drawing a pistol from his holster, he waved it about to show that he meant business.

"Who else wants to speak? A Party member can make whatever suggestions he likes to the Party." Chiang Hua's comrades could see by his manner that he was a seasoned revolutionary, one with iron determination.

"I'm for it!" said a young man with thick eyebrows, large eyes and broad shoulders. His words were to the point and his manner was impassioned. "We'll do whatever the leadership decides. We're ready to lay down our lives, if need be, to emancipate ourselves! . . ."

Chiang Hua nodded.

"Just have patience, Li Yung-kuang!" Then he turned to address the others in a low voice, "Our Red Army is smashing the enemy's encirclement. They've a hard struggle on their hands. We must do more here, in the White areas, so as to drain off some of the enemy's strength. . . . Let's discuss what steps to take."

Li Yung-kuang cut in:

"Uncle Lo-kuei is fully prepared and so are we. As soon as the Party committee gives the order, all the men in our district security corps will go into action. First we'll surround the house of Landlord Hsing and I'll charge in and kill the swine! Then we'll move on. . . . What do the rest of you say, comrades?"

Tai Yu, who had kept silent all this time, patted Li Yung-kuang on the shoulder. Having cleared his throat loudly several times, he said:

"Good for you, young chap! Are you a Party member or one of the Youth League? I like your spirit! We must fight to wipe out local bullies and vicious landlords and set up a soviet government in North China!"

Barely had he finished when three shots rang out sharp and clear — the signal that an enemy had been sighted. The men squatting in the mud stood up and cocked their guns. Chiang Hua gave the order in a low voice:

"Keep still! Wait just a moment!"

"Quit dreaming, you Reds! You're surrounded!" a rough voice shouted as more shots rang out.

"That dog Hsing and his men have surrounded us!" whispered Li Lo-kuei in dismay to Chiang Hua and Tai Yu. "What shall we do? Most likely it's the county security corps — how did they get wind of this? . . ."

After listening for some seconds, Chiang Hua raised a hand calmly.

"Steady on, comrades! If we don't want to die we must resist, and put up a stiff resistance too! We've twenty men here, all armed." He stopped to shout to the sentinels on the dyke, "Lie down! Fire when they come near!" Looking at the peasants gathered round him in the mud, he went on, "We can't hold them off for long. We must retreat under cover, then scatter and go underground. . . . What do you say, Old Cheng?" He turned to Tai Yu, known here as Cheng Chun-tsai, hoping for support.

Tai Yu, his face a pasty white, faltered:

"What a blow! What a blow! We've no choice left . . . but . . . to resist."

Sharp reports were heard all about them. The two young sentinels fired back, shouting as they did so:

"Here they come! The county security corps is charging us!"

Paying no further attention to Tai Yu, Chiang Hua ordered Li Lo-kuei and the other peasants:

"Li Yung-kuang will stay here with me to cover your retreat. The rest of you under Li Lo-kuei's command are to break out at once. Fight your way out! We'll meet at Two-*Mou* Plot before daybreak to decide on our next move."

Li Lo-kuei seized Chiang Hua by the arm and panted, "That won't do! I belong here. You withdraw with the others. I'll cover you." Despite the tight corner they were in, there was reverence and love in all the eyes fixed on Chiang Hua.

"Didn't you hear me? The enemy is closing in. Get going! This is no time to be polite!" Chiang Hua's experience as a commander in the Anti-Japanese Allied Army stood him in good stead as he calmly issued firm orders to these peasants who had never before engaged in battle.

They obeyed, and insisted that he had the best gun. Then they lobbed hand-grenades, making the enemy drop to the ground in terror. Li Lo-kuei seized this chance to break through with his men. Lying flat on the damp, icy dyke, Chiang Hua and Li Yung-kuang kept up such a steady fire that although Landlord Hsing and the chief of the county security corps had between fifty and sixty men, they dared not advance.

"Go on! Rush them! The rebels are escaping. Why don't you charge?" shouted Hsing and the bloated chief of the security corps. But, as soon as any of their men made the slightest move, Li Yung-kuang opened fire and Chiang Hua followed suit. After two militiamen had been hit in rapid succession, the others dared not stir. When Chiang Hua judged that his men were well away, he and young Li made a dash for the sorghum fields below the dyke. Li was hit while running. Chiang Hua slung his comrade's gun over his own shoulder, lifted him bodily and ran straight on, his face pressed close to that of the young peasant. Before he had run far, he felt a spasm pass through the heavy body in his arms. Chiang Hua slowed down, and Li Yung-kuang opened his eyes. "Tell mother not to grieve too much," he said. ". . . Keep on fighting. . . ." The next moment he was dead. Chiang Hua slowly lowered the strong body, now fast turning cold, on to the clammy ground, and gazed down at his dead comrade for a moment. Shots were ringing out close behind him, and he had to leave the young fighter.

He did not realize that he had been hit in the arm, and he finally broke clear away. After running to the house of Aunt Li, Yung-kuang's mother, and hiding the two rifles, he went back to see Tao-ching, and set out again shortly afterwards.

Chapter 4

It was early summer. The whole of northern China, including the lovely countryside round Tinghsien, was humming and pulsing with life. White clouds were sailing slowly through the sky and in the fields the peasants, in twos and threes, were hard at work. Willow tendrils hung low over the banks of a stream, where only the shouts of children broke the stillness.

"Look, look!"

"See that little frog!"

Their happy cries, ringing out in the fresh morning air, quickened the spring-time gladness in the hearts of all who heard them.

"Look, Miss Lin! Is that sedimentary rock?"

"Isn't this a pretty flower, Mr. Chao!"

About a dozen school-children, girls and boys of twelve and thirteen, were walking down a country road with Tao-ching and another teacher. In high spirits they called out as they went along, turning their heads eagerly in every direction. Two girls with bobbed hair, a little behind the others, were talking in whispers.

"Look how popular Miss Lin is, Hsiu-ying! Of course, Mr. Chao isn't bad either . . ." said the plumper of the two, as she picked and smelt a roadside flower. "You know, lots of our form want to join the revolution. I'd like to join the Red Army, Hsiu-ying, but I don't know how to set about it. . . ."

"You mustn't! You simply mustn't!" exclaimed Hsiu-ying, the thinner girl. "Why, Kuo-hua, haven't both Miss Lin and Mr. Chao told us that we're still too young? Our job now is to study hard to prepare ourselves for the future — perhaps by that time the Communists will have come and the Red Army too!"

"No! I don't agree with you. Joining the revolution means joining the Red Army. It means taking up a rifle and fighting!"

"Kuo-hua! Hsiu-ying!" Tao-ching called back to them. "What are you two arguing about? Hurry up! You can have your debate when we get there."

The arrival of these children on this fine Sunday morning brought the willow-clad stream by Wuli Village to life. The boys and girls scattered to play along the winding bank. Some took off their shoes and paddled in the chilly water, hunting for turtles, eels and fish. The pleasing treble of girls' voices under the willows filled the quiet countryside with the spirit of spring.

Tao-ching sat on the sandy bank with her white silk scarf round her neck. Watching the youngsters at play, she said softly to the other teacher:

"Look, Yu-ching, at the results you've achieved!" She smiled and pointed to the boys searching for fish. "Not long ago they were just naughty children. But look at them now. . . ."

"There's nothing to boast about yet," replied Chao Yu-ching, a young man in his early twenties, with a thin, clean-cut face and intelligent, eager eyes. He had been tracing characters on the sand but raised his head now to continue thoughtfully, "Without guidance, you feel like a kite cut adrift in mid-air. We can't go on like this indefinitely."

"I don't suppose we can." Tao-ching, thinking of Chiang Hua, sighed. "You met my cousin. If he were here, we should know better what to do. . . . He told me the day he left that someone would come, but so far no one has; and that was weeks ago." She broke off a willow twig and toyed with it, looking wistfully at the young man.

"Still, when you come to think of it," he said, "we haven't done so badly even on our own. All these children are for revolution, and some of our colleagues are sympathetic too. We can soon try something big."

Tao-ching shook her head.

"No, I think we'd better ask the Party to send someone here as soon as possible. I've already written to ask, though I don't know if anything will come of it." After a thoughtful pause she went on, "They've played long enough. It's time to start the discussion."

Chao blew a whistle, and at once the youngsters put down their pails, spades and fishing rods, and gathered around their teachers. With the exception of a few older girls like Li Kuo-hua and Liu Hsiu-ying, who were still neatly dressed, the children were spattered with mud. Sticking out their tongues at each other in fun, they started wiping their faces with their sleeves. The harder they wiped, the dirtier they became, and Tao-ching broke into a laugh in spite of herself.

"No, my dears, you'd better go back to the river and wash your hands and faces before we start."

The children rushed to the river to clean themselves, and then swarmed back to sit round their teachers. The look of mischief had vanished from their faces, and they gazed intently at the two grown-ups. Then Tao-ching spoke, in a kindly voice charged with feeling.

"You are good children of China, every one of you. You all know why you should love your country and you are all anxious about it. You know, too, in what direction China will go. In future we shall live in a very happy society, like the people in the Soviet Union do today. Have you all read that book, *The Happy Life of Children in the Soviet Union*? Yes? Good. Then let's discuss why the children there are so happy, while the children of our country have such a hard time."

Warm sunlight, filtering through the willow branches, shone on the circle of children on the bank as, flushed with excitement, each tried to be the first to speak.

"I think it's because the children in the Soviet Union are well fed and clothed, and all their parents have work. . . ." Li Kuo-hua's huge eyes glowed with eagerness as she spoke.

"But I think the most important thing is being able to study," put in a boy with cropped hair, who had a dirty nose. "Very few children in our country have the chance. Look at me! My father has to bring up five of us on fifteen yuan a month — how can he afford to keep me in school? A boy in the Soviet Union goes to primary school, to high school, to the university. As long as he makes good progress, he can study as much as he likes. But l-l-look at us! Look at m-me! . . . How d-d-difficult it is for me!" He had begun to stutter because he felt so strongly on the subject. His small face was flushed, and his eyes were rounded by intense feeling.

Another boy looked scornfully at him and said:

"Pipe down, Pi Teh-jui! If you keep on, your eyes will start popping out!"

"You make f-fun of me . . . yet you . . . t-talk about revolution!" Pi Teh-jui turned away, hurt, his eyes now suspiciously red.

Tao-ching stood up, looking sternly at the boy who had teased him. "What Teh-jui said is quite right: he was speaking from his own experience. You all know how well he does his lessons; but his family is too poor for him to go on studying. Every day, when school is over, he has to go to the railway to pick up bits of coal or hunt for scraps on refuse heaps. He often comes hungry to school. . . . Let's think why it is that the children of our country have to suffer so!"

No one answered — they were all looking at Pi Teh-jui. They saw the boy who had taunted him hang his head, step up to him, and then clasp his hand.

"Good for you, Hsueh-chang! That's true class solidarity," said Chao, smiling at the lad. "Sit down now, all of you. Let's go on with our discussion."

Just then one of them called out, "There's someone coming!" Beyond the willow trees appeared the dark bulky figure of Wu Yu-tien, riding a bicycle.

Tao-ching quickly walked over to him and said, smiling:

"So you like this spot too, Mr. Wu! We are having a good time here with the children, playing games and reciting poetry. Kuo Mo-jo's *The Goddesses* is a fine anthology. Won't you join us, Mr. Wu?"

Pushing his bicycle, Wu Yu-tien replied with a haughty toss of his head:

"As today is Sunday, I am on my way to visit a relative. I didn't expect to find you all here. . . . Go on with your recitation. You'll all of you be great poets some day, no doubt!"

He paused uncertainly, while the children stared irresolutely at him. As he walked slowly away pushing his bicycle, a shrill chorus of children's voices burst out behind him, reciting Kuo Mo-jo's poem "Stirring of Morning".

Morning, pale as moonlight,
Penetrates the serried depths of the wood;
Scattered shadows interlace confusedly on the silvery sand.

Clear the sea beyond the pines,
Far, very far, shapes of islands loom hazily,
Clinging still, one might think, to last night's dream. . . .

Two months after Chiang Hua left Tinghsien, things had begun to change in the primary school. Acting upon his instructions, Tao-ching did her best to win over as many people as she could. First she approached Chao Yu-ching, who already had revolutionary leanings. Similarity of outlook made them rely on each other for encouragement, and they often discussed how best to proceed with their secret work in the school. Gradually more of the students and staff began to favour active resistance to Japan. A students' self-governing association was founded, as well as literary, music and modern drama societies. Tao-ching was on good terms with most of her colleagues, for she had followed Chiang Hua's advice to make friends before trying to influence them. In particular, she had done her best to make the cautious, conservative headmistress like and trust her, so that she would not interfere with their activities.

Once the headmistress asked casually:

"What do you and the children do out in the country, Tao-ching? In your half year here, you've become more and more like a child!"

"They're all members of the literary society, aunty. We all like literature, so we enjoy finding some beautiful spot in the country where we can recite poems or fine prose. I really think you should join us some day."

The headmistress chuckled and dabbed her lips with a handkerchief.

"I'm too old. I haven't the poetical inclinations of you young people. . . ." Looking more serious, she whispered, "Mr. Wu tells me that you are regarded as suspect, and Chao Yu-ching too . . . that you take the students out of town to hold meetings. You had better be careful! We can't afford to have the school's reputation damaged." Then, stroking the girl's hair, she went on with concern, "Is anything wrong? You've been losing weight. Have you had any letters from Mr. Chiang? . . . My brother and Hsiao-yen have written several times telling me to take good care of you. So be a good girl, and don't give anyone a chance to gossip!"

"Do you really believe Mr. Wu, aunty?" Tao-ching waited calmly for the answer.

After a second's hesitation, Miss Wang shook her head.

"No, I don't. But I'm responsible for this school, you know. That word 'communist' makes me nervous."

Tao-ching broke into laughter. Clasping the elder woman's thin fingers in her own, she said affectionately:

"Don't you worry, aunty! There's nothing to be afraid of. The Kuomintang call every patriot a Communist. All I've done is tell the children to love their country and work hard at their lessons. How can any Chinese with a heart not love his country? Think, aunty, of the danger China is in! . . ."

The headmistress nodded, her small eyes glistening with tears.

So the underground activities went on.

One evening shortly before the summer holidays, the janitor told Tao-ching that there was someone to see her. Her heart missed a beat. "Can it be Chiang Hua?" she wondered.

She hurried to the gate.

She was disappointed to find that it was Tai Yu. Nevertheless, she quickly extended her hand.

"Haven't seen you for ages!" said Tai Yu cordially, clasping her hand in his. "I'm passing through, so I took this opportunity to call."

"It's certainly been a long time. Do come in!" Tao-ching showed him to her room and, treating him as an old friend, continued:

"You see, Chiang Hua hasn't written to me since, and we've had no one to whom we can turn for guidance. Your coming is really providential!" She trusted him implicitly.

"Has anyone from the city been to see you?" asked Tai Yu as he puffed at a cigarette.

"No one at all!" Tao-ching pouted, feeling like a child again in the presence of a revolutionary. "There are only two of us here. The other's a Mr. Chao — young, keen, a very good man. We have rallied a number of teachers and students round us, and done a little propaganda and educational work. About a dozen of the staff and students are progressives and close to us. . . ."

"Who are they? What are their names?" interposed Tai Yu. "What sort of showing have they made?"

"Can't all that wait for a bit?" Tao-ching's suspicions began to be aroused and, remembering Chiang Hua's advice, she withheld the names.

"Of course." Sipping his tea, Tai Yu waved a hand to stop her. "Tell me your plans for the future — are you satisfied with merely doing propaganda work?"

"Chiang Hua said we mustn't be impatient, that it would take time to build up our strength . . . and that a single spark could start a prairie fire."

"But that's a mistaken, rightist view!" Tai Yu's incisive tone took her by surprise. She listened to a long harangue on the Chinese revolution, unable to tell whether he was right or wrong. There was, however, no mistaking his final injunction: "Fetch that Comrade Chao. I'll discuss with you both what to do."

When Chao Yu-ching had come and Tao-ching had lit the lamp, they seated themselves round the desk, and Tai Yu proceeded quietly to issue instructions. It was well past nine when he took his leave, and at once the two others engaged in a heated debate. With a flushed face, Tao-ching declared:

"If we go about it his way, mark my words, we're sure to end in trouble! Don't you see it's because we've won over the headmistress and some of the staff, because we've isolated Wu Yu-tien, that we've secured a footing here and can push on with our work? If we overthrew the head, where would we be?"

"You're wrong!" Chao, just as excited, gazed at her steadily. "And don't get so worked up, Tao-ching! We mustn't be timid about carrying out the orders of the leadership. We must obey, even if it lands us in trouble. What's more," he looked at her flushed, distracted face and lightly pounded the desk, "isn't it common knowledge that Wang Yen-wen has been currying favour with the Commissioner of Education, that she has been using the students' food money to do business, in league with Wu Yu-tien? On Wu's advice she's been spying on the teachers and students. Haven't you heard everybody complaining? Comrade Tai was right when he said, 'They're flunkeys of the Kuomintang.' The people here have no experience of struggle — we should seize this chance to baptize them in the fire of battle!"

With her elbows on the desk, her head buried in her hands, Tao-ching remained silent for a while.

"What about it? If you have any objections, say so!" Chao's voice was both friendly and insistent.

"What can I say? Down with Wu Yu-tien, down with the headmistress. . . ." Tao-ching looked up in utter bewilderment. "Since these are orders, we must carry them out. But I really can't understand — does the headmistress count as an enemy?"

"Should the cause come second and personal attachments first?" Chao suddenly frowned at her sternly. "You've been very friendly with her all along. It's been 'Aunty' this and 'Aunty' that. . . . I never liked it. Still, that's all over now. Since we've received instructions from our leadership, we must carry them out resolutely. . . . Revolution ought to be like a storm, like thunder and lightning, sweeping everything before it, as in so many places. . . ." Conscious that he had become too heated, he went on in a lower voice, "Remember, comrade, I took part in the students' movement at the Second Normal School in Paoting, I know what I'm talking about. Don't hesitate any more. Let's discuss how to proceed." Dislike for Wang Yen-wen's vulgar way of ingratiating herself with certain teachers, and an awareness of some of her faults, made Chao determine to overthrow both her and Wu Yu-tien. Tao-ching, lacking the courage of her convictions, agreed to his plan in a state of bewilderment.

In the morning, three days later, while the children of the lower forms were skipping to school with their satchels on their backs, something extraordinary was going on in the fifth and sixth forms. In the playground, boys and girls in twos and threes were talking in conspiratorial whispers. When the bell for study rang, not one of them went to the classrooms. Not even when, some time later, the bell for classes rang.

Wu Yu-tien, the sixth-form master, stopped outside his classroom, his shaggy eyebrows knitted in anger. Then he turned and made his way, fuming, to the headmistress' office. Chao Yu-ching, the fifth-form master, put in an appearance and then went away.

As Wu and the headmistress were conferring in whispers, a crowd of shouting students approached. The headmistress' thin face instantly turned the colour of wax, and her legs started trembling.

Wu Hsueh-chang, Li Kuo-hua and three other student delegates rushed in. Concentrating their attention on the headmistress and Wu, they demanded:

"Miss Wang, why do you feed the boarders so badly? How much money have you made from our food payments?"

"Wu Yu-tien, you're a stooge of the Kuomintang! Why do you spy on us? Why do you persecute patriotic students who want to resist Japan?"

The next moment the grounds re-echoed with angry cries:

"Down with Wu Yu-tien!"

"Down with Wang Yen-wen!"

Children with flushed faces, waving their arms, jumped up and down in a frenzy of excitement.

"Go back! Go back!" shouted Wu as soon as there came a lull. He stood at the door, his pale face composed, as he confronted the fifty or sixty youngsters.

"Go back to your classrooms! Are you out of your minds to let yourselves be used by the Communists in this way? If you really make trouble, you'll be sorry for it."

"Boys and girls! . . ." cried the headmistress in a voice that trembled. Her lips were pale and her small eyes glistened with tears. "Don't be so foolish! Don't! . . . Go back to your classrooms!" Tears ran down her cheeks.

Intimidated by Wu's threats and touched by the headmistress' tears, some of the students crept back to their classrooms, thoroughly crestfallen. The remaining thirty-odd, headed by Wu Hsueh-chang and bold, idealistic Li Kuo-hua, went on screaming and jumping up and down outside the headmistress' office. Up to the present Tao-ching had always held the progressive students in check, warning them many times not to expose themselves. Now, encouraged by Chao Yu-ching to go ahead without fear, these untried children, whose heads were filled with revolutionary ideals, proceeded recklessly with their demonstration.

"Down with Wu Yu-tien, flunkey of the Kuomintang!"

"Down with self-seeking Wang Yen-wen!"

"Down with cowards who compromise!"

Dividing into two groups, they took it in turns to shout themselves hoarse. They reproached their fellows who had slipped back to the classrooms.

The atmosphere became increasingly tense. The little school, where quiet had always reigned, had suddenly turned into a battle-ground. There was virtually a strike in the two upper forms, and some of the more timid children of rich families stealthily went home. The lower forms had filed as usual into their classrooms, when the bell rang; but their teachers' eyes kept straying towards the school grounds. They were telling themselves in dismay, "This means serious trouble. . . ."

In the grounds, the older boys and girls went on shouting at the top of their voices, flushed and rowdy as if they were engaged in a street brawl. Some quite beside themselves uttered meaningless cries. Some had no idea who their opponents were, but went on yelling and jumping about with the rest.

Chapter 5

The headmistress and Wu sat silent for what seemed an age. Then, noticing a gap in the students' ranks, burly Wu broke through the cordon and rushed out of the school.

"After him! Quick! Catch the sneak!"

"Hurry up! Let's go and petition the Bureau of Education!" Li Kuo-hua's suggestion was taken up at once, and a number of boys and girls ran out after Wu.

"Aren't you coming, Pi Teh-jui? Come along! We're going to the Bureau of Education!"

Li Kuo-hua and a big pock-marked boy named Li Chao-ao took Pi Teh-jui's arm to drag him off with them.

"I — I'm not g-going. . . ." he stuttered, sniffing. "What's the use? I'd rather spend the time scavenging." And with a drooping head he re-entered the school.

"Bah! He's caved in!" Li Chao-ao cried angrily after him, and then ran to catch up with the rest.

As soon as Wu and his pursuers had left, Tao-ching got some other children to paste up red and green posters all over the school, including the lavatories and the dining-room. Some bore slogans like: "Down with the headmistress!" and

"Down with Wu Yu-tien!" Others, which aroused more attention and surprise, read: "Support the Chinese Soviet Government!" or "Support the Chinese Communist Party!" Boys and girls, gathered to read them, exchanged glances of pleasure, curiosity or fright.

"Look at that! The Communist Party. . . ."

Some teachers, fighting down their alarm, ordered their forms back to their classrooms; others stared at the posters in wonder and delight.

Tao-ching was the third-form mistress. At first she had remained in her classroom like the other teachers of the lower forms, glancing from time to time outside and straining her ears to catch all that was going on there. When the other teachers left their classrooms after the demonstration broke up, she went out to find Chao Yu-ching. But the rash, impetuous youth was nowhere to be seen. He had hurried off to help the petitioners.

"Do your best to mix with the people round you and not to give yourself away. Try by every means to win sympathizers. . . ." The day that he was wounded, Chiang Hua had told her these principles for underground work in the areas under Kuomintang control. What would the outcome of the petition be? What would happen now that Chao Yu-ching and she had exposed themselves with all the progressive students? The last bell rang, the boys and girls went home, and Tao-ching walked back dejectedly to her room. She had just sat down to compose her troubled mind and consider what to do next, when in came the headmistress, her hair dishevelled and her eyes swollen and red. She looked straight at Tao-ching for some seconds, then sat down stiffly. With lowered head, she asked:

"Miss Lin, have you no conscience? Have I treated you so badly all this time?"

"What do you mean, aunty?" This visit was no surprise to Tao-ching. Though she had not stepped entirely into the open, the headmistress was bound to conclude that she had been behind today's demonstration.

"I've plenty to say!" Wang Yen-wen raised her head, her face livid. "You came to me on my brother's recommendation. The truth is that I've always taken special care of you. I was told from the start that you were under suspicion; but I refused to believe it. It was quite inconceivable to me that a young girl should have joined any party or be taking part in such dangerous, criminal activities. Later on, Mr. Wu warned me more than once that you and Chao Yu-ching had been gathering the students for meetings, meetings to propagate communist ideas. Even then I still refused to be convinced. I went to the length of speaking up for you!" She sighed and was silent for a moment. Then her face hardened. "It's certainly impossible to judge a man's heart from his face! I never imagined that the two of you would set my students against me and Mr. Wu, that the walls of my school would be posted with communist slogans! . . . Well, Miss Lin, what more is there to be said? The facts are plain enough for all to see. Do as you think fit. Justice will have to be done!"

She stood up and swept angrily away before Tao-ching could make any attempt at self-justification. For a long time the girl just sat there in a daze.

That afternoon few children came back to school. Their parents, hearing of the trouble, kept them at home and so classes had to be suspended. Tao-ching was very worried. Luckily Liu Hsiu-ying and three others responsible for "liaison work" came from time to time to report what was happening outside.

"Mr. Chao and our schoolmates stood for a while outside the Bureau of Education shouting slogans, demanding the dismissal of the headmistress and Mr. Wu. Then they went to the county government, and they're still shouting slogans there."

"Mr. Wu has gone to the Kuomintang headquarters. Miss Wang is at the Bureau of Education."

Tao-ching was on tenter-hooks and the time seemed to drag. When Chao and the students were not back by three o'clock, she could remain inactive no longer and with more than a dozen boys and girls she set out for the county government. Clouds of dust rose from the dirt road and the summer sun beat mercilessly down as with flushed faces they ran on, panting. Suddenly they saw Chao Yü-ching and his party approaching. Both sides broke into exultant cries.

"You're back! You're back!"

"We've won! We've won!"

Dancing with joy, the youngsters nearly fell on each other's necks, while the two teachers clasped hands. Chao, whose thin, dusty face had caught the sun, called out excitedly:

"Tao-ching, our struggle has ended in victory! At first the Bureau of Education took no notice of us. The county government ignored us too. But we kept on shouting slogans and threatening to wreck the government office, and they had to give in. Both the head of the district government and the Commissioner of Education came out to see us. They've promised to dismiss Wang Yen-wen and Wu Yu-tien." Patting Tao-ching on the shoulder, Chao ended with a smile, "Now, how about it?" By this he meant, "So I was right, after all!"

Tao-ching felt elated too. Less because of their triumph than their safe return. Not disclosing this, however, she squeezed the hands of two youngsters and cried with a laugh:

"I'm so glad! At last you're back!"

It rained that night, and Tao-ching, bewildered by this abrupt turn of events, uncertain what it would lead to, could not sleep. She did not share Chao's easy optimism, and had no confidence in herself. Her thoughts kept turning to veterans of the struggle, men like Chiang Hua and Lu Chia-chuan. Dozing off, in her mind's eye she saw their faces and they seemed to be telling her, "Steady on, Tao-ching! Don't lose your head! . . ."

There was actually a voice calling her name. She woke with a start. It was not a dream. Someone was tapping on the window.

"Miss Lin! Miss Lin!" piped a frightened, barely audible voice.

Tao-ching jumped up and opened the door. It was pitch dark outside and the rain was coming down in torrents. Pi Teh-jui was standing by the door, drenched and shivering with cold. He seized her by the arm and panted:

"Miss Lin, something's gone wrong!" He paused for breath, too agitated to speak.

Tao-ching's heart missed a beat. But calming herself, she said softly, "Take it easy, Teh-jui! What's happened?"

"Miss . . . Miss Lin, my dad . . . dad sent me here to tell you . . . you're in danger!"

"What do you mean? What danger?" It must surely be something serious to have brought this child with the streaming nose to school so late at night and in the pouring rain.

"You must go, Miss Lin! Right away! They are coming to arrest you and Mr. Chao!"

"What? . . ." Tao-ching pulled the lad into the room.

"My dad heard this while he was serving tea in the county government office. They had a meeting this evening, the county head and men from the Kuomintang headquarters." Pi Teh-jui stared up at Tao-ching through the gloom. "My dad heard what they said. Tonight, at twelve, they're coming to arrest you and Mr. Chao. . . . You must run away — quick!"

Tao-ching looked at her watch: it was getting on for eleven. Patting Pi Teh-jui on the shoulder, she said, "You're a good boy. Thank you! Thank your father for me too. It's still raining as hard as ever, but you'd better run home. One moment! Is anyone else going to be arrested?"

"No, no one else. Do hurry, Miss Lin, and tell Mr. Chao. . . . Hurry! And run away as fast as you can!"

Then Pi Teh-jui made off. Tao-ching stood gazing after his small figure in the heavy rain until it disappeared behind the low wall. Then she made haste to knock at Chao Yu-ching's door.

They held a hurried consultation. Incredulous at first, Chao was reluctant to go. Losing patience, Tao-ching said:

"How can you be so sure you're right? I tell you, we're in real danger! All right, if you won't go, neither will I!"

"Since you feel that way, let's go then." Chao buttoned his coat. "But where are we to go? We can't just drop our work in the school like this, and there are the youngsters to consider, too."

"You're right. Of course we can't go far. Besides, we must tell them what to do after we've left." Tao-ching thought it over. "I tell you what, Yu-ching. I'll go to Liu Hsiu-ying's home. She lives at Wang Village and her father is a carpenter. Through her we can keep in touch with developments here. And I suggest you go to stay with Wang Pi-fu. Another thing: should we warn those colleagues of ours who are close to us — Old Chin, Old Wang and Old Ho?"

"I know what to do. Leave everything to me." His eyes flashed. "You go first. I'll be off as soon as I've attended to these matters. Tomorrow morning I'll send word to you; and then we'll consider what steps to take next."

"Good! But mind you do go! I'm going back to my room to pack some things. In ten minutes, let's leave together over the wall."

"We'd better not leave together. You go first, I'll follow soon. I've been through this before. I'm not afraid!"

Tao-ching had no more to say. Calming herself as best she could, she clasped Chao's hand firmly and looked steadily at him.

"Yu-ching, be very careful! Good luck and goodbye!" she said in a tremulous voice.

The young man flushed, appreciation in his eyes. Up till now their sole concern had been the work, but at this tense moment of parting he was touched by her warm-hearted concern for him.

Chapter 6

That night Tao-ching fled through the pouring rain to the home of her pupil Liu Hsiu-ying.

On Chiang Hua's advice, she had not only worked for the revolution in the school, but had also made friends with the parents of some of her pupils. Of these, the one closest to her was Liu Hsiu-ying's mother, a robust, middle-aged peasant woman with six children who, despite all her difficulties, was cheerful, optimistic and hard-working. Mrs. Liu's outlook on life and her rich experience had helped to open Tao-ching's eyes; for as a city-bred student, Tao-ching was somewhat prejudiced against peasants although she had lived in the country and known quite a number of villagers. The peasants had seemed a poor, empty-headed lot, lacking in culture and sadly limited in their interests, but her friendship with Hsiu-ying's mother made her change her views. This carpenter's wife knew everything about farming and the hard lot of those who toiled and sweated in the fields. She had a store of amusing anecdotes which her husband had picked up when he visited different villages. She had, too, a genuine understanding of life, of the bitter class struggle in the countryside, and of the countless ways in which the ruthless landlords and usurers fleeced the impoverished peasants. Tao-ching learned from this ordinary labouring woman that the peasants were by no means as stupid or backward as she had imagined, but simply ground down by incessant poverty. Now, confident that friendly Mrs. Liu would help her, Tao-ching had fled to her house. The capable, intelligent woman took her in gladly.

The Lius' courtyard was kept in good trim. Gourds and beans were trained over the trellis, and their green leaves breathed peace and tranquillity in the warm sunshine. The room facing north was partitioned into three, and from one of these divisions, the kitchen, smoke was rising. It was nearly lunch time, and Mrs. Liu was tending the stove as she talked to Tao-ching.

"Don't worry, lass!" She smiled reassuringly. "Just stay here for a few days and see how things go. We country folk have a saying, 'There's no river that can't be crossed.' "

"But how can I idle here, sister, while at school. . . ." She broke off as Hsiu-ying came in.

Early that morning Hsiu-ying had gone to school to see how things were. Now with tears in her eyes and her head drooping, she told Tao-ching:

"Mr. Chao has been arrested!"

"Hsiu-ying! Tell me how it happened." Tao-ching no longer lost her head in a crisis. "Go on!"

"Last night dozens of men from the Public Security Bureau and the security corps surrounded the school. Mr. Chao was still there, still busy with something, so they caught him." Hsiu-ying's lips quivered and she wiped her eyes.

"How about the other boys and girls? Any of them taken?"

"Yes," said the girl with a sob. "Li Kuo-hua and Wu Hsueh-chang. . . . As soon as we got to school this morning, all of us who had anything to do with yesterday's petition were hustled by the headmistress and Mr. Wu to the Kuomintang headquarters for a lecture. A skinny official, like a monkey, warned us that if we made any more trouble we'd all be shot. . . . They threatened to shoot you and Mr. Chao too!"

"Don't cry, Hsiu-ying!" said Tao-ching, staring at the small green gourds on the trellis. "They'll be all right. Is there any more news?"

"No . . . that's all." Hsiu-ying was still sobbing. "But, Miss Lin, what are you going to do? They're looking for you to arrest you!"

"Don't worry, Hsiu-ying, they won't be able to catch me. . . . Will you tell Pi Teh-jui, Li Chu-ying, Chu Yu-kuang, Wang Kuang-tsu and Li Chan-ao to meet me by your village pond tonight? We'll have a talk there."

"That horrible, pock-marked Li Chan-ao has sold out!" Hsiu-ying pouted and wiped her eyes. "In the Kuomintang headquarters he took their side, preaching at us and making fun of us. I hate him!"

Tao-ching paled, but she took the girl by the hand and said with a forced smile, "We can do without him. Just tell the others then."

That afternoon, before Tao-ching could meet her pupils, a woman of fifty or thereabouts came to the house. She carried a small basket filled with scraps of cloth and designs for embroidered shoes. Sun-tanned and thin, she was genial but rather shy. She seemed to be on good terms with Mrs. Liu, for after greeting her with a smile and without saying a word she walked into the inner room. Tao-ching, seated on the *kang*, was busy writing. She was taken aback by the entrance of the stranger, but rose to greet her and offer her a seat.

"Don't mind me, lass! Go on with whatever you're writing. I can sit somewhere else," said the woman slowly with a smile. Putting her basket on a chest, she seated herself on a stool.

Close behind her came Mrs. Liu, a mysterious smile on her face.

The girl looked from one to the other, at a loss what to say.

The awkward silence was broken by the visitor asking, "Would you like to buy some shoe patterns? These are new and pretty."

Tao-ching shook her head. "I'm afraid I don't wear embroidered shoes."

"Why not? They make a pretty girl all the prettier!" The woman looked at her appraisingly, then turned to Mrs. Liu with a smile. "What a lovely girl she is, a regular charmer! What wouldn't I give for a daughter like her!"

Tao-ching smiled in embarrassment. Perching on the edge of the *kang* and looking into that kindly face, she asked gently, "Do you belong to this village, aunty? Surely you've a daughter of your own?"

"No, she's no one at all!" Mrs. Liu spoke for her guest. "She lost her husband long ago, and her only son just recently." Glancing at the other woman with a sigh, she left the room.

Tao-ching was very puzzled, for Mrs. Liu had promised to keep her presence a secret. Still, she entered into conversation with the visitor.

"It's hard being all alone, aunty. How do you manage?"

"I manage all right." Her calm, confident tone surprised Tao-ching. "I've plenty of god-sons and god-daughters, you know. With this basket on my arm I make my round of the villages and never go hungry. But where are you from, lass, and what are you doing here?"

Tao-ching's heart started pounding as she wondered if the Lius could have given her away.

"I've just come for a little visit, aunty," she replied, in a tone as calm as the other's. "The rain yesterday was timely, wasn't it? It ought to help the harvest."

"Yes." The older woman sighed, her eyes on Tao-ching. "The last few years we've had more than our share of droughts and floods. Worse still, there's been civil war, and bandits are a regular plague everywhere. Life's not easy for common folk like us these days. You don't belong to these parts, lass. Are you a teacher?"

"Yes." Tao-ching tried to look unruffled. "I'm Hsiu-ying's teacher and I came to ask her mother to do some needlework for me. She kindly invited me to stay for a day or two, and I was glad to accept. Do you live in this village, aunty? Have you come to ask me to write a letter for you?"

"Oh, no!" the other laughed. "I've come to ask about someone. Do you know a Mr. Chiang Hua?"

Tao-ching could feel her heart beating fast. Who was this woman? What was behind these questions? But Hsiu-ying, who had just come in, was smiling. Her mother, too, had worn a mysterious smile. Suddenly Tao-ching understood: this must be Chiang Hua's "aunt".

"Yes, I know him," she said calmly. "Do you?"

The woman looked at Hsiu-ying before coming over to Tao-ching and grasping her hand. "Did he never tell you about his aunt, child?" she asked with a smile.

"Oh, so that's who you are!" Tao-ching threw herself into the other's arms. Then she grasped her hands, thin, gnarled hands, strong and full of warmth.

"I'm sorry, child!" The woman made Tao-ching sit beside her on the *kang* now that Hsiu-ying had gone out, leaving them alone. "My nephew told me you were teaching in the school. I ought to have come to see you earlier; but things have been tricky here and I've been away. I couldn't manage to come any sooner. . . . Still, I've been hearing about you."

Now Tao-ching realized why Mrs. Liu was so progressive. She must have told Chiang Hua's "aunt" all that had happened. She listened in silence and with wonder as the elder woman went on:

"Why, I understood you were doing quite well at the school. How did things go wrong?"

Tao-ching replied in a whisper, "One day a Party member called Tai Yu came to see me and told us to attack the headmistress and a teacher called Wu. In this way we were exposed and our plan fell through."

"So somebody called on you!" The other spoke calmly, but she looked disconcerted.

Tao-ching was bewildered.

The older woman kept silent, engrossed in her thoughts.

Tao-ching, her eyes on that dark, wrinkled, ordinary face, thought with sudden insight, "She's the one who fights shoulder to shoulder with Chiang Hua!"

"I'm sorry I didn't reach you earlier, child," said the woman in a soft affectionate voice as she picked up her basket. "But it's no use regretting that now. Let's face the facts. The enemy's on the war-path. You must go into hiding."

"Aunty," said Tao-ching impulsively, "I don't want to go away. I've so many pupils here. How can I leave them?"

The other smiled and stroked the girl's soft hands. "Good revolutionaries aren't rash, child!" she replied. "You can't keep hidden here, and I'm not going to throw you to the lions. Of course, in the end the victory will be ours, but a man standing under low eaves must lower his head."

Instead of explaining the need for occasional retreats to conserve the revolutionary strength, she simply tried to convince Tao-ching that Tinghsien was too dangerous a place for her to be in.

"But, aunty, I've nowhere to go. Can you find a place for me?"

"Well, lass," said the soft-spoken woman after some thought, "you can come with me. I'll fix something up for you."

"Oh, good!" Tao-ching smiled. A little worried, she went on, "Please don't forget my pupils and Chao Yu-ching — he's a fine young man, and they've seized him too."

The older woman nodded and her tired eyes opened wide, a youthful light in them.

"Don't grieve, child. The day that we win, we'll settle scores with the die-hards. . . . My son Li Yung-kuang — have you heard of him? — gave his life a short time ago. My own flesh and blood! It tears at a mother's heart! But this is revolution! . . ."

Her head drooped, and tears coursed down her wrinkled cheeks.

"Don't distress yourself, aunty!" begged Tao-ching, touched by that grief-stricken face. "You have lost one child, but you've many, many more. . . ." A lump came into her own throat.

Aunty Li left, her basket on her arm, after promising to come back in two days to fetch her. At once Tao-ching turned eagerly to ask Mrs. Liu, "Sister, can you tell me more about her?"

"I don't know too much myself," was the reply. "She and her husband were good, honest peasants who lived in Tawang Village twenty-five *li* away. They were so poor, they hadn't even one *mou* of land, and both of them had to work for a landlord. When the peasants revolted at Kaoyang and Lihsien, her husband joined in the uprising and was killed. He left her a son called Li Yung-kuang, a fine young fellow who led the struggles in these parts. As for the mother, well, you won't easily find her match. Everyone in the neighbourhood knows and likes her. Anyone in trouble can always count on her help. She never fails. This is how she carries on her work, rain or shine, all the year round." Mrs. Liu mopped her perspiring face with a corner of her jacket and picked up a cloth sole that she had been sewing. "That woman is a marvel," she continued. "In the daytime, she calls at the houses of various landlords to do odd jobs or

sell knick-knacks to their womenfolk, but when night falls she takes up revolutionary work." She smiled.

But this meagre information could not satisfy Tao-ching, who looked eagerly into her face as if to urge, "Do tell me more about her!"

Chapter 7

Three days later, towards evening, Chiang Hua's "aunt" told Tao-ching to change into some country clothes and took her to her home, twenty-five *li* to the west. It was dark when they reached the lonely cottage just outside the village. "Aunt" Li unlocked the door, went in and lit a paraffin lamp which was on a shelf. Its dim light disclosed a *kang* with only a tattered mat, a faded cotton quilt, and a big pillow for bedding. As Tao-ching was looking around curiously, the other guessed what was in her mind and said:

"You've never seen a home as poor as this, have you, child? But what can I do? I had a few sticks of furniture and some cases, but I had to sell the lot. Even that is an advantage — I've no possessions now to stand in my way!" Laughing, she brushed the dust from the *kang* and bade Tao-ching sit down.

The flickering light of the paraffin lamp mingled with the moonbeams streaming in through the torn window paper, and filled the room with an eerie haze like some fairy-tale hut in a forest. Romantic and imaginative, Tao-ching fell under the spell of this strange atmosphere and sank into a happy reverie. While the older woman was lighting a fire in the outer room, Tao-ching sat dreaming on the *kang*, carried away by the strangeness of these surroundings, so different from anything she had known before. She marvelled at Chiang Hua's "aunt", a weary, middle-aged, ordinary type of woman, but so young in spirit, so fine. . . . She came back to reality when Aunt Li brought her a cup of hot water. Slipping down from the *kang*, she took the elder woman's hand in embarrassment and said hastily:

"What's this for, aunty? I'm not thirsty."

"If you're not thirsty, child, I am!" Aunt Li smiled. "I've been hoeing the landlord's fields all day. I'm tired and parched." She picked up the big bowl, blew on the hot water to cool it, and took a sip. Tao-ching's thoughts began to wander again. Never having worked in the fields, she naturally had no idea of what it meant to be tired out after back-breaking toil. Her new friend's exhaustion made her ashamed of herself. Here was a middle-aged woman who had already done a hard day's work, yet she thought nothing of trudging scores of *li* in the evening to escort someone along the dark country paths. . . . Tao-ching felt the tears pricking in her eyes. For a long time she was too moved to speak.

That night she shared the single quilt and pillow with Aunt Li, who fell asleep as soon as her head was down. Tao-ching could not sleep, however. She was tormented by a number of questions. Where was she to stay? How was she to live in future? What work could she do?

The lamp had been put out and the moonlight had vanished. No sound disturbed the quiet of the room except her companion's heavy breathing and the occasional far-away yelping of dogs. Tao-ching could hear her own heart thumping. Several times she longed to turn over, but restrained herself, not wanting to disturb her bed-fellow. She did not have a wink of sleep that night.

When Aunt Li awoke at daybreak, Tao-ching had already boiled some water. She now put a small brass wash-basin on the edge of the *kang*, which served the treble purpose of bed, table and bench.

"Aunty, you slept soundly last night," she said cheerfully. "Are you still thirsty? Here is your hot water."

"You're a dear child!" Aunt Li beamed as she took Tao-ching's hand. "I've never been waited on like this before."

"We shall all have a good life, aunty, when our kind of society comes into being. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, to be sure. Even so, it's a treat to have somebody boil water for me now. I'm in luck!"

Aunt Li began to cook while Tao-ching fed the stove with firewood. They breakfasted on corn meal buns and millet gruel, after which Aunt Li said:

"I've found a teaching job for you in a landlord's family. All right?"

"A landlord's family?" Tao-ching was taken aback.

"Yes, what's wrong with spending a little time in comfort?" Aunt Li smiled.

"No, I don't want to go anywhere like that!" For the first time since they had met, Tao-ching pouted.

The other patted the back of her hand and laughed. "You're wrong, dear, I'm not sending you there to live in comfort. I'm asking you to do a useful job. This wicked old money-bags is a big landowner who has mcre than two thousand *mou*. He's looking for a governess for his grandchildren, and I've managed, through a friend, to get you the job. This is a good chance. You'd better take it."

"But what for? I don't want to work for any landlord!"

"No! No! You go, child," said the kind, coaxing voice. "You can be useful to us in that household. I'll take you part of the way, then we will meet Mr. Wang Chih-li, the school inspctor for this county. He'll introduce you to the landowner. You can say you come from Tientsin and are a high school graduate. The rest, Mr. Wang will tell you. Let's go now, shall we?"

Tao-ching's great dark eyes rested on the older woman, whose firm but tender voice impelled compliance. So, raising no further objections, she changed into her own clothes and they set out.

The landlord, Sung Kuei-tang, lived in a village on the border of Shentse County adjoining Tinghsien. When the two women had walked a dozen *li* or so, they met a man in a long silk gown, whom Aunt Li addressed as Mr. Wang. Tao-ching guessed that he was one of them. When the introductions had been made and the woman was about to turn back, Tao-ching caught her by the arm and said impulsively:

"Come and see me often, aunty! Don't forget me!"

Aunt Li took Tao-ching's hand in her own and smiled. "Silly child! You've no call to be cast down. My nephew warned me that a city girl like you would need toughening. Show some pluck now, and do your best to fit into country life. You mustn't be afraid of hardships or dirt. If you are really in difficulty, someone will surely help you out. I will come to see you from time to time too. Now, go with Mr. Wang. He's made all the arrangements with Sung Kuei-tang."

Tao-ching was deeply touched. So Chiang Hua had left word about her! It coincided with his advice to her: "You must be strong enough to stand any test." She was immediately encouraged and brightened up again.

"I'll remember what you've told me, aunty," she said, flushing. "Mr. Wang, I'm ready to go."

As Tao-ching proceeded with her new companion, from time to time she stole curious glances at him. He was under forty, and had a pale face and small moustache. In his faded grey silk gown, felt hat and spectacles, he looked like one of the gentry. It made her rather uneasy to be conducted by a man of this sort to the house of a notorious landlord, but trust in Aunt Li helped her to overcome her misgivings.

They followed the winding river bank in silence, a hot sun blazing down on them. Tao-ching broke into a sweat, but Mr. Wang went on imperturbably. They had covered twenty *li* or more and were nearing their destination before he stopped and quietly said:

"You must change your name. Shall we call you Chang Hsiu-lan?"

Tao-ching nodded and smiled shyly. "Chang Hsiu-lan?"

"Yes, and you mustn't let slip anything about your past at the Tinghsien school. Otherwise we shall all be in trouble. Just tell them you are from Tientsin, where you were a schoolmate of my cousin, Li Chen."

Tao-ching nodded, making a mental note of the name. Then she turned to ask seriously:

"Mr. Wang, what if they ask me my reason for coming to the country?"

"A good question." He smiled and nodded his approval. "What would you say?"

"I think I'd tell them that I couldn't find a job in Tientsin, so I came here to stay with my aunt. Would that do?"

"Yes, tell them that by all means. I must warn you of one thing, though. That old miser Sung Kuei-tang is such an obvious scoundrel that we can deal with him without much difficulty; but his son Sung Yu-pin, a graduate of the China University, is more tricky. I doubt if you're a match for him, so be on your guard."

Tao-ching was horrified, and involuntarily halted. "You say he's worse than his father? Then I . . . I. . . ." She wanted to ask why they were sending her to such a place, but checked herself. Hadn't Chiang Hua said she must be ready for any test? Gritting her teeth, she followed Mr. Wang.

He guessed what was passing through the mind of this city girl who was coming to live in a landlord's household in the country, where everything would be new to her. To make matters more complicated, it was a danger spot, among enemies. . . .

"Don't worry, you won't be alone," he said with a smile. "Your 'aunt' and I will often come to see you. Your first task is to establish good relations with the family. Try by all means to make them like you — the children and the rest of the household too. That will help you to do some work among the farm hands."

"Make them like me?" echoed Tao-ching in alarm. "I don't mind making friends with farm hands, but landlords. . . ."

Mr. Wang laughed, cutting her short. "We'll discuss that later. The important thing is for you to be on good terms with that family. You must also pretend to be as ignorant as possible."

Both of them fell silent. Tao-ching was secretly impressed by the discretion and composure of her companion.

Soon they reached Sung Village and arrived at an imposing mansion which extended almost the whole length of the street. Tao-ching's heart thumped as she passed through the high black gate. Her father and spiteful stepmother seemed to be before her again. They had been cruel and vindictive, but this Sung family might be even worse. She felt as though she was entering a tigers' lair, and had to summon up all her courage to hide her emotions as she walked into the hall.

The doors and windows were glazed in the Western style, but the desk and hardwood furniture were Chinese. Tao-ching and Mr. Wang were greeted by a plump, dapper man of about thirty-five, who was wearing a cloth gown. This was Sung Yu-pin, who welcomed Tao-ching politely.

"It's very good of you to come and teach my children. My father is so attached to them that he won't hear of their attending school. That's why Mr. Wang recommended you to us. We are glad to have you here."

"I've not much experience in teaching, but I'll do my best," Tao-ching responded diffidently.

Mr. Wang, silent hitherto, now interposed, "Mr. Sung, Miss Chang is a straightforward, honest girl who hasn't seen much of the world. I hope you will take good care of her."

"Certainly," replied Sung, as a girl of about twelve and a boy a few years younger ran out from the back room and halted in the doorway. The girl showed pleasure and surprise at the sight of Tao-ching, but the boy muttered, "Bother it! A girl!" He rushed abruptly into the courtyard, shouting, "Grandpa! Grandpa! I don't want a girl to teach me!"

"He's been spoiled by his grandfather," Sung apologized. "I hope you'll take them both in hand, Miss Chang. I'm counting on you."

"Thank you, Mr. Sung. I'll do my best, you may be sure."

When Mr. Wang took his leave, Tao-ching looked earnestly into his face, not knowing whether to be glad or sorry. He said to her softly, "Don't worry. Your 'aunt' will be over in a couple of days."

She nodded and smiled. "Please tell her I'll do the very best I can here. She's not to be anxious."

After Mr. Wang had gone, Sung Yu-pin exchanged a few words with Tao-ching. Then the door curtain was pushed aside and in came a thin, pale-faced woman in her thirties, leading the two children.

Sung Yu-pin stood up and told Tao-ching, "This is my wife. She's not in the best of health." He turned towards his wife. "This is Miss Chang. Mr. Wang, the inspector of schools, recommended her. Please see she has all she needs!"

Mrs. Sung did not reply, but scrutinized Tao-ching closely. Fortunately the girl's embarrassment was short-lived, for the boy set up a clamour to go to the village temple and see a play. His mother's attention was diverted, and she said to Tao-ching with a smile, "I expect you to take an interest in these two, Miss Chang. They're too young yet to have much sense."

Controlling her resentment, Tao-ching nodded. She took the hands of her new charges and asked their names.

Their mother answered, "He's Wen-tai and she's Hsiao-su."

"What nice names!" Tao-ching stroked their hair and smiled. "Do you like stories?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Wen-tai, clutching her arm. "Do you know *The Five Heroes in the Eastern Capital*?"

"I know quite a lot of stories." Tao-ching laughed. "But I only tell them to children who do what I say. What other stories do you like, Wen-tai?"

Hsiao-su put in, "Oh, anything with fighting in it. He'd go without his dinner to hear about the generals in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*."

"Be quiet, baby!" shouted Wen-tai, who seemed much rougher than his sister. The moment he scowled, she was silenced.

Sung Yu-pin, closely observing what was happening, smiled at his wife. "Miss Chang is a good teacher. I'm sure she can handle them well. Have you prepared a room for her?" He turned to Tao-ching. "Won't you go and have a rest?

My father has been unwell recently, I'll introduce you to him when it is convenient."

Just then a tall, spare old man in a dark grey homespun gown came in. He was leaning on a cane, and roared, "Why the devil do I need to be introduced? Are you the governess, Miss Chang? You're welcome." Without waiting for a reply, he turned to his son with a frown on his shrivelled face. "It'll soon be time to harvest the wheat, Yu-pin. You must see to all the details. Mind you order the farm hands to reap Wang Lao-tseng's three *mou* east of the village. And remember we've also bought Sung Wen-kang's two *mou*. You must pay more attention to these matters. Sooner or later all the property will be yours!"

"You're too old, father, to worry about such things," said Sung Yu-pin brightly. "All my time is taken up with outside business. An invitation has just come from the lawyers' association in Paoting, and I'm considering accepting it. As to home affairs, what does it matter if we ask a little less than our due from those poor villagers?"

Before he could finish, the old man cried angrily, "I warn you, Yu-pin! . . . Did our forebears build up the patrimony so easily? The way you're going on, there'll soon be nothing left of it." Then he wagged a finger at his grandson, who was tugging at his stick, impatient to be off. "You're another spendthrift, Wen-tai!"

Sung Yu-pin and his wife merely smiled as the old man shuffled angrily away. He turned at the door to stare at Tao-ching, who had been watching in silence, as if to see whether she looked like a thief or not. "Wen-tai! Hsiao-su!" he roared. "You must work hard with this governess. Just think! Ten yuan a month and board besides! You'll be the ruin of your grandfather!"

That night, Tao-ching went to bed in a strange but freshly papered room. In imagination, two figures kept appearing before her. One was thin sallow Mrs. Sung, whose threatening eyes made her tremble, though whether from aversion or fear Tao-ching could not decide. The other was the old landlord leaning on his cane, whom she pictured glowering at her and bellowing, "Don't touch anything of mine! I pay you good money — ten yuan a month besides board!"

She turned her head towards the bright moon shining through the window and sighed. "Why should I put up with such humiliation? How can I stand it here? I'll have to wait on their children, while they regard me as a thief or worse!"

Suddenly she recalled Aunt Li's parting advice, "My nephew left word with me that a city girl like you needed toughening." This had a tonic effect and turning over she admonished herself, "Tao-ching, the Party sent you here. You must carry out your instructions. Lu Hsun said, 'Revolution means suffering: it is inevitably mingled with filth and blood.'" She struggled all night with her misgivings, and was unable to sleep.

Two days later, Tao-ching was somewhat happier, for with her story-telling she had won over Wen-tai. She also felt that Sung Yu-pin was less sinister than Mr. Wang had made out. In fact, he struck her as the only comparatively reasonable and kindly member of the family. On her second day there he had told her, "You know, Miss Chang, I thoroughly dislike helping my father to collect rents and debts. But what else can I do? He's too old to manage on his own. These few *mou* of land are ruining my career. I'd much rather be doing research work." He talked so earnestly that she pitied him. It did seem unfortunate that a university graduate should fritter away his time at home. The high compound walls made the place seem like a prison.

The landlord's mansion did, in fact, bear some resemblance to a prison. Within its large black gate were three main courtyards and three smaller ones. In the first main courtyard a row of rooms faced north. It was there that the steward collected rents, made loans or weighed the grain brought in by the tenants, and there the dozen or more family guards slept. Opposite were five large rooms, flanked by smaller ones. The large rooms, in one of which Sung Yu-pin had received Tao-ching, were used by the family, while the smaller were guest-rooms for men. In the side yard on the east were stables and sheds for the hired hands. The main courtyard in the middle was a big one with rooms on all four sides. Those facing south were occupied by Sung Kuei-tang, and the others, fitted with iron doors, were store-rooms. The large courtyard behind this had buildings on three sides: five bright, spacious rooms with a southern exposure for Sung Yu-pin's family, a west wing which served as his study and an east wing which was the children's classroom. On the east side of the yard next to this were three northern guest-rooms for women. The door of the middle one opened on to the yard. Tao-ching's bedroom was on the west side. The kitchen and living quarters for the maids were in the east and west wings. The side yard adjoining the main courtyard in the middle held a mill and store-rooms for furniture and farm implements. Thus a family of only five — the old landlord's wife had died — occupied a house of more than sixty rooms encircled by high walls. Well might Tao-ching be reminded of a prison! Moreover, the farm hands were strictly forbidden to enter the second main courtyard, to say nothing of the back one. Women visitors were admitted only to the guest-rooms reserved for them. Not even the old landlord's married daughter could stay in the main courtyard, which had its own solid brick wall and small iron door. When this door was locked at night, that courtyard was cut off from the rest of the world.

After two days in this "prison", Tao-ching discovered that she was being closely watched. Aunty Chen, who had the room opposite hers and did some of the washing and sewing for the household, would work in the main courtyard in the daytime, when Tao-ching was teaching in the classroom. When the girl returned, she followed closely on her heels. Stranger still, on two occasions Tao-ching caught her standing outside her small window peeping in. She was annoyed by this prying and was also puzzled, for the old woman seemed to be a fairly honest person. Remembering that Mr. Wang had advised her to fraternize with the servants and hired hands, she thought, "Why don't I start with her? She's one of the oppressed too." So the third evening she made a point of chatting with Aunty Chen, and after some general remarks went straight to the point.

"Aunty, why do you watch me all the time as if I might be up to some mischief? Did Mr. Sung tell you to?"

Aunty Chen's pock-marked, wrinkled face was suffused with colour and she stared for a while before awkwardly saying, "You musn't think that, miss. Nobody told me to. . . . But you're a young girl all alone here, you need somebody to look out for you." Her answer rang so true that Tao-ching was mollified and made haste to change the subject. "How many are there in your family, aunty? Do your folk live in this village?"

"My folk?" The old woman shook her head and sighed. "I have none. This is all the home I have."

"Why? How can that be?"

Aunty Chen wiped her eyes with the hem of her jacket. "My husband was killed in the colliery at Chinghsing. My son died years ago. As for my daughter, after her marriage they took her to another province, and I haven't heard from her for years."

"Oh, aunty, that must be very hard for you!" Sympathy took the place of Tao-ching's distrust as they exchanged looks of mutual understanding.

Strange to say, from then on Mrs. Sung looked with less disfavour on Tao-ching, and there was less malice in her piercing eyes. And Aunty Chen, instead of spying on the girl, showed kindly concern for her, bringing her hot water and keeping her lamp filled with oil. Still, Tao-ching remembered to be on her guard.

Chapter 8

One of Tao-ching's duties as a governess was to take the children for a stroll after lessons. One day, she and Wen-tai happened to find their way through one of the side yards to the threshing-floor, which covered nearly two *mou.* At its southern end, beside a clump of date trees, were some shacks in which hay was stored. Sung Kuei-tang was no fool. He knew that farm hands driven to desperation would set fire to the landlords' hay; so to safeguard his family and store-rooms, he had built these sheds at some distance from the living quarters.

As Tao-ching and Wen-tai approached, a man with unkempt grey hair and shabby clothes, helped by a boy of about twelve, was busy cutting hay. This lad accosted Wen-tai with a grin, while the man kept his head lowered and went on with his job.

"Let's go, Miss Chang," cried Wen-tai. "There's nothing to see here." He was tugging her away when the man raised his dark, care-worn face, and his eyes with strangely white eyeballs met those of Tao-ching.

"He looks familiar. Where have I seen him before?" she wondered, as he stooped to his work again.

She led Wen-tai off to the orchard, where she could not help asking:

"Wen-tai, who's that old man?"

"A farm hand — Cheng the Idiot," replied the boy, shinning up a small apricot tree.

"Cheng the Idiot! What's his real name?"

"That idiot? He hasn't got one. Here, catch!" He tossed an apricot to Tao-ching, while he sat in the tree eating fruit.

That whole afternoon the words "a farm hand — Cheng the Idiot" preyed on Tao-ching's mind. She had been deeply disturbed by the man's rags, his dark, ravaged yet familiar, good-natured face, and the expressionless eyes which had stared at her.

In vain she tried to remember where she had seen him.

Two days later, passing through the side yard at dusk, she again met Cheng the Idiot. He was drawing water at the well, and as nobody else was about, she decided to speak to him. Again those strange white eyeballs gleamed at her. They

looked ghastly in the twilight, and she wondered whether it was anger or anguish that made him glare at her as he slowly let go of the windlass and approached her. As his terrible eyes drew nearer, her heart started pounding, and she had to muster all her courage not to run away. She stepped forward and said softly, "Cheng. . . ." Then she broke off with a smile, blushing, not knowing what to call him.

The man wiped his sweating face with a dirty towel.

"Your name is Lin, not Chang!" he cried hoarsely.

Tao-ching was completely dumbfounded. How did he know her name? What if the Sungs learned of this! . . . She ran back to her room, where she racked her brains once more. And at last she remembered. . . .

Nine years previously, when she was twelve, Tao-ching had gone with her parents to Kupeikou to collect rents. In the pretty village she had made friends with Hei-ni, the daughter of a tenant farmer. Hei-ni was a lovely, gentle child with a flair for embroidering pouches and sewing cloth toys, who also liked telling stories and catching butterflies. Tao-ching took a great fancy to this girl of her own age. Almost every day, without the knowledge of her stepmother or her half-brother, she went to see her. Her stepmother had forbidden her to play with the tenants' children, whom she referred to as "clumsy brats" or "little ragamuffins". Tao-ching, however, who had no such prejudices, enjoyed Hei-ni's company and became attached to her friend's parents who lived in the tiny cottage. Cheng Teh-fu, the father, was a sturdy, quiet, kindly man, who always had a smile for Tao-ching and tried to catch rare birds for her. His wife, a placid, gentle, good-looking woman, treated her much better than her stepmother did, always keeping some walnuts or dates for the little guest. When Tao-ching came, she would hand them to her, saying:

"Take it, girlie! We're too poor to offer you anything good."

Tao-ching would accept, and find the gift delicious.

Soon the two girls became so inseparable that Tao-ching could hardly tear herself away from Hei-ni, even though her stepmother scolded or beat her for it. One day, however, a heart-rending scene took place, a scene too deeply engraved on her mind for her ever to forget.

That morning when she went to call on Hei-ni, she found her on the door-step sobbing bitterly. Her mother, who was sitting on the *kang*, was also weeping. Her father was tugging at the girl to drag her away.

Tao-ching stood outside, staring in perplexity, as Hei-ni wailed, "Don't be so cruel, dad! . . . Don't make me go, mum! . . . You won't starve, and neither shall I. . . ."

Hei-ni's mother sat cross-legged on the *kang*, tears running down her face. At last, turning away from her only daughter, she cried:

"We'll all three die of hunger if you stay. You're a sensible girl. Go back, dear, where you belong. The landlord's taken our crops as rent . . . there's nothing left. Last week we still had bran and vegetables, now we've not even leaves or bark!" Her voice broke and she could not go on.

Hei-ni's father tugged at her arm. "You'd better go, child! We shall all die of hunger if you stay."

Faced by starvation, Hei-ni's parents had sold her, when she was seven years old, to a small trader as a child-bride. In this household she was treated like a beast of burden, beaten and abused, and each time she came to see her parents she refused to go back. Unable to feed her, they had no alternative but to harden their hearts and force her to return.

Now she was sobbing, her thin shoulders shaking under her ragged jacket, her great eyes as pitiful as those of a calf being driven to the slaughter-house. Misery made this girl of twelve seem older than her years, as she begged her parents:

"Dad! Mum! Don't force your own daughter to go back to hell! They'll beat me to death there if they don't starve me to death first. Please! Please!"

Her mother, after one last despairing look at her daughter, turned her face to the wall, sobbing, "Dear heart! You'd better go! . . . When spring comes, when the trees are budding . . . when there's grass and the fields are green . . . we'll have food again; then we can take you back. . . ."

Now even Cheng Teh-fu, a sturdy peasant of forty, could no longer hold back his tears. Mother and daughter were crying as if their hearts would break, but the threat of starvation hardened the father's heart. He lifted the frail girl over his shoulder and strode out, without wiping his tears or turning his head. Though Hei-ni cried and struggled, she was too weak to free herself. Tao-ching followed them until they rounded a hill. Father and daughter were soon lost to sight and she gave way to a fit of weeping.

Tao-ching had never seen Hei-ni since or heard any news of her. Now what had brought her father — called Cheng the Idiot, as if he had no name of his own — to this small county in central Hopei? And where were Hei-ni and her mother? . . .

Tao-ching could not sleep as she recalled these events of the past which still made her blood run cold. Neither could she understand Cheng's changed attitude — he had glared at her as if she were an enemy. Full of grief and worry, she longed for Chiang Hua or Aunt Li to come and tell her what to do, or to take her away from this hateful landlord family.

Aunt Li did come as dusk was falling, four or five days later. Her grey hair was neatly combed, her homespun jacket and black cotton trousers were spotless. Tao-ching was delighted to see her. They shared the same room that night, and lying in bed they talked in low voices.

"Do the Sungs like you, lass?" was the elder woman's first question.

"All but Mrs. Sung and the old man."

"Why not? You should do your best to please them too."

"Oh, they are treating me much better than they did at first. You don't know what dirty looks Wen-tai's mother gave me when I first arrived! And then Aunty Chen. . . ." Tao-ching recounted her experience with the old servant.

"I see!" Aunt Li laughed. "Of course Wen-tai's mother was jealous when she saw that you were a pretty girl. You'd better go and chat with her from time to time, and hint that you have a sweetheart. Then she may feel a little better towards you. Why doesn't the old man like you?"

"Because he's such a skinflint! Parting with ten yuan is agony to him. Yet he must let his grandchildren study. He has engaged a governess because he has no use for the village school, but he can't help resenting paying me the money."

"So that's it!" Aunt Li thought for a moment. "Then why not try asking for two yuan less?"

Tao-ching laughed, remembering Moliere's *L'Avare.* If a man owning thousands of *mou* set such importance on a single cent, he would certainly be glad if she offered to take two yuan less.

"I'm so happy you've come, aunty!" she said. "I'll take your advice. But I really don't want to stay here. It's just no use."

"Why not?" The low voice seemed to shatter the gloom. "You wouldn't be told to stay if it was no use. My child, the peasants have had all they can put up with from the landlords! There's going to be a struggle over the wheat harvest. You know old Sung and his son are in touch with all the big men in the county. Do your best to learn what you can about them all, and your knowledge will help us in our work. Of course, it's not easy. You mustn't let them become the least suspicious of you, much less find out your real identity. . . ." She grasped Tao-ching's hand firmly. "It's a heavy responsibility, dear!"

Tao-ching squeezed her friend's strong, rough fingers as she answered tremulously: "I know what you mean, aunty. But I'm afraid . . . it may be out of my power."

"Why?" came the sharp question. "Didn't you just agree to it?"

Tao-ching was obliged to tell her about her unexpected encounter with Cheng Teh-fu. "I don't know why he hates me," she said resentfully. "He was so fond of me when I was young. He knows my name — the one I was known by in Tinghsien. Just suppose, aunty. . . . What shall I do?"

For a long time there was no answer and the elder woman's

regular breathing sounded as if she were asleep. Tao-ching's mind was in a turmoil. These complex developments were too much for her. She felt like a leaf whirled off by a high wind. Hearing no response, she ventured:

"Aunty. . . ."

"What is it?" The distinct reply indicated that the speaker had been wide awake all the time. "Tell me, child, looking back, what you think about it all?"

"About Cheng Teh-fu?"

"Yes. How do you feel about him?"

"Well, it's true that my parents exploited him, but I never did. . . . They treated me badly too."

"That's how it looks through your eyes," came the answer after a pause. "Try looking at it through his eyes. Remember, you're the daughter of his old landlord."

It was Tao-ching's turn to be silent. A sudden numbing pain sobered her into a realization of her own hateful pettiness. A sense of resentment still lingered, because this was not directly her own fault but the result of belonging to a landlord family. She could not speak.

The other seemed to read her thoughts, for she stroked the girl's hair and said softly, "I'll tell you a story, child, to help you understand. You know my son Yung-kuang, he was a stubborn lad. . . . When he worked for Hsing Tse-tsai, the landlord's daughter set her cap at him. She was twenty-eight, and her father hadn't found her a suitable husband. She took a fancy to my boy — yes, he was handsome and sturdy with those thick brows and great eyes. And *was* she good to him! She made him shoes and stockings, worried about his health and many a time slipped good wine and food on to his *kang* just as in the fairy-tales. When my son went back to his room in the evening, he was surprised to find these dainties, but he ate them without troubling to discover where they came from. Later, when he knew the truth, he threw them to the pigs, saying that a landlord's daughter was not in his class — he'd have nothing to do with her. It's true, that girl wasn't bad.

She treated the tenants and farm hands much better than her father did, but my son shunned her like the plague."

"Do you count me as a daughter of the landlord class, then, aunty?" Tao-ching's voice was trembling.

"No, no!" Aunt Li held her hand tightly. "When my nephew asked me to look after you, he told me you had rebelled against your own class and were willing to give your life to the revolution. Why, I count you as my own daughter. . . . Don't be so thin-skinned! I'm not telling this story of my boy to point the finger of scorn at you. What I meant is that the underdogs can't help hating all oppressors and their whole class. So don't blame Cheng Teh-fu for hating you. How was he to know that you had changed and are now on his side?"

To Tao-ching that was no ordinary night, but one of the most bitter heart-searching, one of the most painful nights she had ever experienced. Since following the instructions of revolutionaries like Lu Chia-chuan, and studying some Marxist-Leninist works on the class struggle, she had imagined that she was on the side of the oppressed and had taken a genuine proletarian stand. It had required this stay in another landlord family to reveal that her understanding of the class struggle and her hatred for the exploiters was quite academic. Why had Cheng Teh-fu drifted so far from home? What had made him so poverty-stricken and so wretched? Undoubtedly his cruel exploitation by her father was at the bottom of it. What, then, of herself? Where did she actually stand? Lying listening to her companion's regular breathing, Tao-ching thought with anguish, "I'm just a petty-bourgeois revolutionary idealist. I'm 'pink', when the class struggle is a fiery red. The landlord class — that exploiting class — has branded me with a white mark, a mark deeply engraved upon my soul. That's why I can't bear Cheng Teh-fu's stern glance and dislike him so much. . . . Ah, Tao-ching, what class sentiment is that?"

Never before had she made such a penetrating self-criticism. Realization of her bourgeois outlook made her heart ache. She gritted her teeth and stared at the woman lying beside her, envying her political integrity and firm, clear-cut stand. How had she achieved it? She was not an educated woman and had never studied Marxist theory. Yes, it was a matter of class origin again! The fact that Aunt Li came from a bitterly oppressed class enabled her to face reality squarely, and to understand the class struggle, whereas Tao-ching herself was soft-hearted, weak and afraid of ruthless struggle. She had not yet discarded the false dignity of a landlord's daughter or humbled herself before the grievously wronged tenants. . . . In the darkness she seemed to see Hei-ni, lovely and slender as ever, looking at her eagerly and tenderly. Tao-ching's heart warmed as she remembered their childhood friendship. But the next instant Hei-ni's gentle eyes were transformed into fearful white orbs with a hateful gleam in them. . . . Tao-ching opened her eyes in unbearable anguish of spirit.

"Where is Hei-ni? Is she still alive?" Once more she recalled the tragedy of their last meeting. "Why did Hei-ni cry so bitterly? Why did her parents force her to go back to her mother-in-law? Why did a seven-year-old girl have to become a child-bride?" Tao-ching had always hated her father and stepmother for their ill-treatment of her and her own mother. For the first time now she hated them for what they had done to others. At last a genuine class hatred made her begin to detest the landlord class, and all other oppressing classes, from the bottom of her heart. She also began to hate the mark left on her by that class.

Chapter 9

The next morning, Aunt Li saw, to her surprise, that Tao-ching's face was pale and there were dark hollows underneath her eyes.

"Aren't you well today, child?" she asked.

Tao-ching shook her head and answered shyly, "I didn't sleep last night. I. . . ." She hung her head and two big tears fell on her jacket. After a short pause, she continued, "I promise you, aunty, I . . . I'm going to give myself whole-heartedly to the working class. . . ."

A sweeter smile than Tao-ching had ever seen before lit up the elder woman's lined face. She took the girl's hand, glanced out of the window to make sure that no one was listening, and said, "I hurt you, child, but you didn't hold it against me. . . . Well, so much the better. It proves my nephew was right when he said the revolution needs young people as eager to learn as you. But one thing I must ask." Again she looked out of the window and lowered her voice. "Didn't Mr. Wang tell you to do some work among the farm hands? You haven't started yet, have you? What are your plans?"

With a shamefaced look Tao-ching answered, "I've been too upset since I met Cheng Teh-fu. I had meant to begin with her. . . ." She made a gesture towards the opposite room. "With Aunty Chen, I mean. But I dared not go too far, because she seems so close to the Sungs."

"She's a servant all the same. And she doesn't seem to treat you too badly, or to be a willing tool of the Sungs. First try to make friends with her, then look for a chance to interest her politically. It will be a great help if you can win her over. Don't be too hasty, though. Be very careful! This will be good training for you."

Tao-ching nodded. Seeing that the other was getting her few belongings together, she asked anxiously:

"Are you going, aunty? How can I get in touch with you in case of need?"

"Do you know Hsu Man-tun?"

Tao-ching was a little surprised. "The carter with shaggy eyebrows and large eyes?"

"Yes, that's the man. So you know him already, do you?" She went to the window and listened once again. Fortunately Mrs. Sung was ill and Aunty Chen had gone before daybreak to nurse her. This gave them a good chance to talk.

"Get in touch with him," said Aunt Li. "And do what he tells you. But don't let the others suspect that there's anything between you. That's all, then. I must be going. Just remember: your first job is to be on good terms with the Sungs and watch what they are doing. The second is to make friends with Aunty Chen and arouse her political consciousness. The third is to thoroughly change your own class stand so that Cheng Teh-fu stops hating you. Hsu Man-tun may put in a word for you with him, but it's largely up to you."

"You're so good, aunty! . . ." Tao-ching looked at her with gratitude for this advice.

After the elder woman's departure, Tao-ching recalled her first meeting with Hsu Man-tun, under whom she was to work in the days to come. He had a strong sense of humour. The day after her arrival, while strolling during the afternoon with Wen-tai, she had seen a strongly built man about thirty years of age with shaggy eyebrows and large eyes. He was drawing water from a well, but at their approach he called to Wen-tai, "Little Master! You're the only hope of the Sung family. Don't come too near the well: it's dangerous!" This was Hsu Man-tun. In spite of his warning, Wen-tai promptly jumped on to the coping-stone of the well. Hsu stopped work then to grab the boy and tease, "How many wives will your grandad find you, Little Master? I know! You'll have three palaces and six chambers for your wives and concubines, like one of the emperors of old. Yes, this mansion of yours is big and fine enough for the six chambers. What you should do now is to build three palaces."

Tao-ching was struck by the farm hand's caustic humour.

"I don't want any wives. . . ." With a laugh, the boy threw himself at Hsu Man-tun and challenged him to a set-to, for the farm hand knew something of boxing. Sparring for fun, they forgot Tao-ching. But when Hsu's glance fell on her, she saw suspicion in his clear, kindly eyes. She had wanted to speak but did not know what to say, rather ruffled by that glint of suspicion.

Since coming to the Sung family, the strange surroundings and the lack of a friend to whom she could talk frankly, had made her depressed. Now that she knew that Hsu Man-tun would be working with her, she felt happier. Moreover, that painful night of self-criticism had left her as light-hearted as though she had rid herself of disfiguring scars. A new spring had come into her step.

After lessons that day, she took Wen-tai for the usual stroll. She hoped to meet Hsu Man-tun, but he was nowhere to be seen. He had recently been busy doing carting and other jobs outside the yard. She decided to look for Cheng Teh-fu, determined to put up with any slight from this unfortunate man, and to love him from the bottom of her heart.

As a governess, Tao-ching enjoyed great freedom of movement, because Wen-tai preferred to play out of doors. He looked forward to going out with her after his lessons, and his parents and grandfather also approved of this. They mostly went to the orchard beyond the yard where Cheng Teh-fu lived. There were many kinds of fruit trees and dwarf poplars in the orchard. There was also a little brook, and Wen-tai would amuse himself catching beetles or climbing trees to pick fruit. Today, as soon as he was up a tree, Tao-ching slipped back to the yard to find Cheng Teh-fu. She had peeped into his hut in passing, and had seen him sitting smoking on the *kang*.

She burst into the small, dark room as if someone were after her, panting:

"Don't you know me, Uncle Cheng?"

"Eh?" He removed the pipe from his mouth and knocked out the ashes. Then, turning his head towards her, he demanded slowly, "What do you want here?" His dry, indifferent tone affected her like a sudden douche of cold water, and a lump came into her throat. At the same time an acrid, fusty smell nearly chocked her; the smell of a room where the sun never entered and of a sweaty, greasy quilt unwashed for years. Cheng's coldness combined with the stench almost undermined Tao-ching's earlier resolution. It was all she could do not to run away, but she forced herself to say quite naturally:

"Aren't you Hei-ni's father? How is she now?"

The name "Hei-ni" sent a shudder through Cheng Teh-fu. In the dim light which penetrated the tiny square window, Tao-ching saw his face turn pale, and his eyes with their fearful

white eyeballs seemed to be regarding her with a dreadful intensity. She was afraid and wondered what was wrong, why his daughter's name caused such a change in him.

"Do say something!" Trying to keep calm, she repeated her question, "I asked: Is your daughter, my friend Hei-ni, well?"

For a long time Cheng Teh-fu remained silent. Then he raised a trembling hand to point towards the door and spoke in a low, harsh voice with a Jehol accent:

"Don't mention that name, miss! Get out! You won't be able to stand the stink in here!"

These biting remarks cut Tao-ching to the quick. She left the room like one in a dream, unconscious of the tears in her eyes.

Once more she was plunged into distress and confusion. She had struggled with her father and stepmother, with Yu Yung-tse and Hu Meng-an, without giving way to discouragement or fear, but here in this village she had been humiliated and hurt as never before by a poor old farm hand, a former tenant of her own family and the father of her playmate. She had promised Aunt Li to come over whole-heartedly on to the side of the working class. Yet this first rebuff filled her with resentment and despair, and she felt that it would be almost impossible to break down the barriers.

That evening, when Aunty Chen had finished her work, Tao-ching, despite her own heavy heart, went to her room.

"You must be tired out, aunty, up so early and to bed so late every day!" Tao-ching sat down on the edge of the *kang* and handed her a package of cigarettes.

Aunty Chen took the gift with delight, saying, "Oh, you shouldn't, Miss Chang! A pipe is good enough for me!" She lit a cigarette. "Tired? I should think I am! How can I help it? Mrs. Sung comes from a well-to-do family and expects a lot. There's no end to the washing and sewing she wants done, to say nothing of how I am expected to be at her beck and call, dressing her and doing her hair!"

"She's not bad-tempered though, is she? She seems to treat you quite well."

Aunty Chen looked at Tao-ching and sighed. "She's all right when she's in a good mood. But when she flares up. . . ." She stopped abruptly, her deep-set eyes staring blankly ahead. After a long while she shook herself and muttered:

"If my old man were alive . . . if my son were alive. . . . I wouldn't have come to this!"

"Had you a son, aunty?" asked Tao-ching softly.

The thin, wrinkled face lit up with joy for a second. A fleeting symbol of lost happiness, the glimmer of a love long hidden in a mother's heart flashed across her face. It was rapidly replaced by a mood of hopeless grief and despair, which made her old voice tremble. "Yes, dearie, I had a son. Such a fine, obedient boy he was — good-looking too! We were poor, my husband worked as a farm hand and I did odd jobs for the landlord. That kept both of us out of the house all day. My boy was the one who took care of our little girl, gathered firewood and cooked for the family. He did a man's work in the house for all he was only ten years old! Then there came a day . . . a day. . . ." Tears ran down her cheeks. "It was snowing that day, and there was no more water in the vat. Our boy was hungry and wanted to cook a meal. He went to the well for water all on his own, and he only ten! The stone round the mouth of the well was coated with ice. He lost his balance, and slipped in! . . . It was a raw day — everybody indoors — so no one noticed what had happened. My poor boy . . . my boy. . . ."

Instinctively Tao-ching gripped the old woman's hand, forgetting the speech she had prepared about class oppression and exploitation. All she could say was:

"Don't, aunty! Forget it. Don't upset yourself so!"

Aunty Chen wiped her tears with the hem of her jacket. Quiet now, after venting her pent-up grief, she looked at Tao-ching with swollen eyes and said:

"Miss Chang, I took to you the first time I saw you, and wanted to tell you all that was in my heart. You know, in the ten years I've worked for this family, I've never before mentioned my boy's death to anyone."

Tao-ching seized the chance to put in, "Like you, I've known hard times too. My stepmother treated me very cruelly. But all employers are rich — what can they know of the sufferings of the poor?"

"You don't look as if you'd known hard times!" Aunty Chen was astonished. "You're so delicate and refined, and you've studied in a foreign-style school."

Tao-ching stood up and turned down the lamp, returning to sit on the *kang* beside the elder woman. "You must be tired, aunty," she said. "Lie down and go to sleep. I'll tell you my story another day."

But the other caught hold of her arm. "Do tell me now, my child!" she begged. "It does you a world of good to pour it out, to tell all that's in your heart to someone near and dear."

"Aunty, I'm so glad you called me your child!" Tao-ching's spirits were rising again. "Nobody has loved me since my mother died, that was when I was only a baby. Well, if you want to hear my story, let's both lie down." They stretched out face to face on the *kang*, and Tao-ching began:

"My mother died when I was one year old. My stepmother was hard and cruel. Our family was rich, so she and her son dressed in silk and the finest wool, but I went about like a little beggar. I dreaded winter most. Though it was freezing cold, I was not allowed to wear cotton-padded shoes and my stockings were full of holes. I was six or seven years old then, but I had to run errands and do all kinds of jobs for her. The least little fault meant a beating or flood of abuse. The chilblains on my heels began to fester until the pain made me cry — but she did not care. She ordered me about just the same, and I had to hobble around as best I could. . . . Oh, it still hurts me, aunty, to remember my childhood: the lice in my ragged cotton coat and tangled hair, my hands numb and red with cold, my feet too sore and swollen to fit into my shoes. . . ."

Aunty Chen impulsively took Tao-ching's hand and with tears in her eyes exclaimed, "Why, you poor child! What you've been through! We may have been poor, but we never let our girl or boy get in such a state. What a hard-hearted woman your stepmother must have been!"

"It's good of you to care, aunty! I'll tell you something I've never been able to forget. One snowy evening when I was only eight years old, my stepmother ordered me to deliver a letter to a man who would give me an opium pipe — I was not to come back without it. The man wasn't at home and I had to go looking for him. It was almost midnight by the time I found him. Snow was falling heavily and the wind was fierce. I was the only living soul in the street. The piercing cold, my fright at being alone, and my utter weariness, made me too wretched to cry. Utterly confused, I missed my way and was soon completely lost. We were living in the west part of Peiping, but I wandered to the north part of the city. Tired out, I wanted to lie down in a doorway, but I knew that if I did, I would freeze to death in the heavy snow and icy north wind. So on I trudged, this way and that. I'd been gritting my teeth in silence, but at last I could bear it no longer, and started whimpering like a puppy as I trailed along. In the small hours of the morning I met a kind ricksha-man who took me home. There my stepmother flew at me, shouting abuse because I'd come back so late and spoiled her pleasure. She even refused to pay the ricksha-man!"

The painful recollection made Tao-ching cry as if her heart would break. In the dim light the old servant fixed her eyes on her, murmuring:

"Poor child! Poor child!" She was weeping in sympathy.

Chapter 10

Two days later, Tao-ching, taking a stroll with Wen-tai at dusk, found Hsu Man-tun in a side yard. He was watering the cattle and talking to Sung Yu-pin. She listened to what they were saying.

"Let me ask you this, Man-tun!" A benign smile spread over

Sung's smooth, plump countenance. "Aren't you farm hands much better off now than in the past?"

Hsu turned his head to reply as he worked the windlass, "How far past do you mean, sir? 'Past' might be any time."

"Yes, you're right." The landlord nodded. "Let us say, compared with the Ching Dynasty. Since the founding of the Republic, a new system of taxation has been introduced and men have equal civil rights. Quite obviously the life of hired hands has changed."

Leisurely filling a petrol tin with water, Hsu glanced at his master with a cryptic smile.

"I wouldn't know. You'd better ask my grandad."

"But you must have some idea." Sung flourished a pudgy hand. "For instance, can't you see any difference between the way I treat you and the way my grandfather treated yours?"

"Yes, sir, you're very soft-spoken." Hsu's cryptic smile made Tao-ching afraid the landlord might sense the irony intended. Sung chuckled smugly, his eyes mere slits behind his horn-rimmed glasses, and then he insisted, "Go on!"

"You often talk about equal civil rights and . . . the sanctity of labour. And you lend us money when we're hard up, that's true. . . . I get much better treatment from you than my grandad did from yours."

Sung nodded rapidly and repeatedly, taking paper from his pocket to jot this down. Then he turned and saw Tao-ching and his son standing there.

"Well, Miss Chang, I suppose you overheard our talk." He smiled. "I'm writing an article called 'A Study of the Present Land Tax', and I mean to examine the difference between the life of farm hands and tenants today, and in the past. Have you any views on the subject?"

Tao-ching shot a glance at that plump, glistening face and the horn-rimmed spectacles which gave him a scholarly look. He hardly seemed as vicious as Mr. Wang had said. Nevertheless she replied:

"I don't understand the subject, Mr. Sung, so I can't have any views. What does interest me is teaching. Can you see any difference in Wen-tai and Hsiao-su yet?"

"I am glad to say I can see a great improvement." Beaming, Sung turned to Hsu. "We're lucky to have such a good governess. Even my father speaks well of her . . . aha!" Though Sung Yu-pin was a landlord, he gave litttle time to his estate and was said to be more interested in books. His frequent trips to the county town, to Paoting or Tientsin, made his father call him a spendthrift.

Hsu winked at Tao-ching, but said nothing.

"Miss Chang, may I ask a favour of you?" said the landlord with a smile.

"What is it?" she asked, surprised.

"I would like you to copy some manuscripts out for me. It won't interfere with your teaching, I assure you."

Tao-ching's first thought was that this would be a good way of seeing more of him, but the memory of his wife's jealous looks deterred her. After a moment's hesitation she agreed. She decided to consult Mrs. Sung first. If Mrs. Sung approved, Tao-ching would ask her to arrange the matter, knowing that she would certainly keep an eye on them. This would be all to the good, for although young Mr. Sung seemed a man of good morals and was said to leave girls alone, she knew she must be on her guard.

Mrs. Sung was astute enough to agree at once to the proposal. Just as the girl expected, each evening she went to the study this thin, pallid, but attractive woman was there. She would sit in a corner sewing until Tao-ching had finished and then accompany her husband to their own room.

At last Tao-ching succeeded in having a talk with Hsu Man-tun, whose attitude towards her had undergone a change. After inquiring how she was getting on with the Sung family, he asked:

"Has old Cheng offended you?"

"How did you know?"

"Oh, I heard something." He was splicing two lengths of thick rope with wire, but raised his head after a while to continue, "He is a decent old chap, you know, honest and kind. A little on the stubborn side, though. You'll have to find some way of making up for the wrong your parents did him."

Tao-ching flushed with annoyance and retorted, "What wrong have *I* done him?" True, she had once admitted that her family had sucked the blood of the peasants, but she could not bear to be taunted with this by others.

Since no one else was about, Hsu Man-tun chuckled and said pleasantly, "Don't be angry. Poor old Cheng! Never mind what I just said. Be patient and things will work out." Then with another of his cryptic smiles he asked, "What do you think of young Mr. Sung?"

"Sung Yu-pin? I think he's much better than his father."

The same ironic glint shone in Hsu's eyes as during his conversation with Sung Yu-pin. "Better, eh?" he said. "Remember: They are all tarred with the same brush. You cannot choose between them. You're an intellectual, miss, so let me give you a piece of advice. Never forget what Aunt Li told you, and that you've come here to teach — you're working for them just as we farm hands do. Remember that Sung Yu-pin is our wealthy master!"

After a moment's reflection, Tao-ching nodded. "Yes, you're right. I'll remember that." She thought again and said, "You've not been here these last few days. Aunt Li said there's going to be a struggle. Do tell me how I can help, and I'll do my best."

Hsu had already finished his work and was clearing up his tackle. "Yes, there's going to be a struggle," he said. "But there's nothing you can do outside. Just get closer to the Sungs and don't forget Aunty Chen. If you get wind of anything important, tell me right away. If I'm not here, go to Tachen Village eighteen *li* away, where you will find Mr. Wang, the cousin of one of your schoolmates. Don't go, though, unless it's really important."

Tao-ching had listened intently. Now, as she was turning away to look for Wen-tai, Hsu raised his voice and said, "Please tell young Mr. Sung we're much better off than before." Then he lowered his voice. "Don't let anyone realize that you know anything when the fight breaks out. We country folk have been driven beyond endurance — what fool says we're much better off!"

This brief talk made a deep impression on Tao-ching, who thought, "What a firm stand he takes! He goes right to the core of the matter!" Hsu and Aunt Li had something in common which she still lacked. She wondered if it was the difference in class background or the innate character of labouring people which set them apart from her. She was happy to know them because they could teach her so much, but she felt a mental discomfort in their presence, as if all her failings were being publicly exposed, causing her a loss of face. She should make up for the wrongs done to old Cheng, indeed! The mere idea made her smart until she found consolation in the thought that Hsu's caustic tone was probably owing to ignorance of her past.

The next day Tao-ching had another tussle with herself. Though her heart was heavy, she went to see Cheng Teh-fu. It was the noon break, and there was not a soul about. She called several times outside his hut, but getting no response, pushed her way in. She was so bent on her talk with old Cheng that the stench in the dark room seemed less nauseating. But the room was empty except for the ragged cotton quilt on the *kang*. She was on the point of leaving, disappointed, when Cheng Teh-fu clumped in. He was taken aback to find her there, and she too caught her breath nervously. They confronted each other in silence for a moment, till Tao-ching ventured:

"Uncle, I've come to see you. . . ."

"You shouldn't put yourself out! What do you want to see me for?" The sharp retort dismayed her, but she went on:

"Don't be angry with me, uncle. I'm not like my father or stepmother. I hate them too. . . ."

"That's your affair!" He sat down heavily on the edge of the *kang* and filled his pipe with hands that trembled, then stooped forward to smoke as if Tao-ching did not exist.

The girl stood in the doorway too embarrassed to say a word till the advice "make it up to him" came to her mind, and Aunt Li's explanation for his antipathy. This gave her the strength to sit calmly down on a stool and tell him about her past. She told him about her own mother and her stepmother's cruelty after her mother's death. . . . But in the middle of her story, Cheng Teh-fu rose abruptly to his feet and went out, taking his pipe. Tao-ching was bitterly distressed. She returned to her room with tears in her eyes, so wretched that she went supperless to bed. She was utterly at a loss to know how to win over this crotchety old man.

Chapter 11

Two days later another incident occurred during Tao-ching's daily stroll with Wen-tai.

They had come to a huddle of shacks where the Sung's tenants and other poor villagers lived, and Tao-ching hoped to see something of their living conditions. All around were mean dwellings with wretchedly small square windows, and in some of the tiny courtyards chicks and pigs were foraging for food on dunghills swarming with flies. Tao-ching lacked the courage to enter any of these shacks, and moreover Wen-tai would not have allowed it. She took the boy around to the back of the settlement where they found a pond overgrown with reeds and water-lilies. With a shout of joy, the child began to chase the dragon-flies which abounded there. Tao-ching had noticed two lonely cottages under a poplar tree, not far away. She warned her charge:

"Be careful, Wen-tai! Don't fall into the water! I'm going over there but I shan't be long. . . ." She pointed to the cottages and then went towards them.

The door of one of the cottages was open and she thought she heard voices inside. Hesitating to enter, she peeped in through the ramshackle window. All she could make out at first in the dim room was a *kang* with a stove beyond it. An old man was lying on the *kang*, with a tousle-haired girl of five or six in tattered clothes nestling beside him.

"Are you better now, grandpa?" asked this child, stroking his beard.

The old man seemed half stupefied. Fingering the child's hair, he answered weakly, "No, love, not yet. . . ." He shut his eyes as if exhausted.

The child, as motionless as a stature, stared at him, her bright eyes contrasting strangely with her pallid, grimy face. There was a gleam of anguish in her eyes — or was it anticipation? Suddenly her mouth quivered, and clinging to his neck she cried:

"Grandpa! Grandpa! I'm hungry!"

Tao-ching, who was listening outside, was very disturbed by the child's cry. Turning round to make sure that Wen-tai was still playing by the pond, and reassured that he was safe, she again peeped through the window.

The old man's eyes were now open, and two big tears were rolling down his haggard cheeks. He wiped them away, shakily drew the child to him and clasped her head against his chest. "Don't cry!" he quavered. "Your brother will bring you back something to eat."

At that point a boy with some faggots over his shoulder came to the cottage. About twelve years old, he was filthy and clad in rags. Tao-ching was too engrossed to notice whether he had seen her or not. She watched him lay down his bundle in the outer room and then go in to see his grandfather.

"So you're back, Little Tiger! Have you brought anything to eat?" The old man raised his head with the ghost of a smile. The child, too, had stopped crying to stare at a bag which was in her brother's hand. Once more she was as immobile as a statue.

Without a word, hanging his head, the boy slowly emptied his bag on the *kang*. Out rolled some unripe apricots and small peaches. His sister could not hide her disappointment, and tugged at the old man's arm, crying:

"I'm hungry, grandpa! I'm so hungry! I don't want apricots!"

With a rueful look, the boy took a sparrow from his pocket and showed it to her. "Don't cry, sis!" he said gently. "I'll roast this for you!"

After one glance, the girl clung to her grandfather and burst into fresh sobs. The old man sat up and stared at the two children. Tears in his eyes, he too sat on the edge of the *kang* as if turned to stone.

The heart-rending scene reminded Tao-ching of Hei-ni and Cheng Teh-fu. Wen-tai's voice aroused her abruptly.

"Let's go home to supper, Miss Chang! Mother said there'd be flat cakes and stewed pork this evening."

Pulling herself together, Tao-ching moved towards Wen-tai. As she did so she saw the sick old man stagger out, sickle in hand, with his grandchildren close at his heels.

The old man lurched stiffly on, gazing straight ahead, while the children did their best to overtake him.

Tao-ching wondered anxiously what he intended to do. Wen-tai, staring after them, asked curiously:

"What's that scarecrow up to, Miss Chang?"

Impelled by curiosity and pity, Tao-ching took Wen-tai by the hand and ran after them. They crossed two fields and came to a plot of land where ripe wheat was nodding in the breeze. The old man started cutting this with his sickle.

"Take this home!" he told the children. "If the landlord can eat it, why can't we?"

The boy and girl stood absolutely still, clutching each other, their eyes fixed on the old man.

A tall figure with a big stick was approaching — it was old Sung Kuei-tang. When the landlord saw what the sick old peasant was doing, he strode over whirling his stick and bellowing:

"Wang Lao-tseng, are you mad? You sold me these three *mou* to pay for your daughter-in-law's funeral. How dare you touch my wheat?"

"*Your* wheat? . . ." Old Wang stopped reaping to fix angry, swollen eyes on his oppressor. "It's not yours!" he said, and went on reaping.

Sung Kuei-tang was outraged and raised his stick to strike the old man. The two peasant children trembled like frightened lambs, but Wen-tai cried cheerfully, "Look! Grandad is walloping them again! He'll give them a good beating!"

Tao-ching glowered at Wen-tai and, forgetting all her instructions to keep on good terms with the Sungs, she dashed up to the landlord. Smouldering with rage, she snatched the stick away and demanded in a trembling voice:

"Why are you beating him?"

Tao-ching's determined action and pale face must have shocked Sung Kuei-tang, for he lowered his hand and glared at her as if she were a stranger. Then bursting into loud, mocking laughter, "Well, well!" he cried harshly. "What's come over you? What's this to do with you? Do you think water is thicker than blood, and charity begins with strangers?" There was a fierce, greedy light in his deep-set eyes.

Old Wang and his grandchildren were thunderstruck, while even Wen-tai was paralysed with fright. Tao-ching glanced sideways at the landlord and said quietly, "Can't you see how destitute they are, Mr. Sung? Such misery! Won't you let them have a little wheat to save their lives?"

"Let them have *my* wheat? . . . No, by heaven!" He snatched the stick back and belaboured old Wang with it, roaring, "You dare reap a crop you've sold to me! You must be mad!"

"Don't beat him!" Tao-ching sprang forward to screen the old man with her body. "You mustn't bully the poor like that!" she gasped.

Sung was ready to turn on Tao-ching in a towering fury, when old Wang caused a diversion by falling on his knees and crying in a trembling but piercing voice:

"Heaven! Heaven! Have pity on us! See the life we poor folk lead! This black-hearted landlord says I sold him my land for thirty yuan to pay for the funeral of my daughter-in-law. But he charges such high interest that I only got twenty yuan. And I sold him two *mou*, not three. Those three *mou* were all we had to live on. Heaven! Heaven! Have pity on us! An old man and two young children — what are we to do? . . ." He shouted and wailed while the boy and girl clung to him, crying.

Tao-ching wept in spite of herself.

For a moment the landlord was dazed, and when he turned around a crowd had already gathered.

"Bah!" he spat at them. "Poverty has driven him crazy! This is blackmail. You can't cheat me like this, Wang Lao-tseng! Give me back the wheat you've taken from my fields!" With a venomous look at Tao-ching, he banged the ground with his stick and then walked away.

The villagers were about to help old Wang up when along came Sung Yu-pin, smooth and pleasant as ever, and pretending to be quite different from his father. Hurriedly helping old Wang to his feet, he apologized, "Never mind, Uncle Wang! You know my father's temper. Don't take offence! If you're short of grain, I'll get a servant to bring you two pecks of ours." Then he turned to Tao-ching with a smile. "Why, Miss Chang, I didn't know you had it in you! My father is old. We can't take him too seriously. Well, it's growing dark. Let's go back now. These good folk will all be wanting to get on with their work in the cool of the evening."

Although the conflict was over, Tao-ching did not return with Sung Yu-pin. At dusk she was standing beneath a locust tree, reflecting more unhappily than ever on the happenings of that afternoon. Her lack of self-control and impulsiveness might make it impossible for her to stay there. She had failed Aunt Li, had failed the Party. What should she do now? On top of her failure to win Cheng Teh-fu's friendship, she had come into conflict with the landlord. Moreover she was haunted by the vision of Wang Lao-tseng and his grandchildren.

What a hell on earth their life was! Were all Chinese peasants on the verge of starvation? . . . She did not go back until late; her mind still in a turmoil, she lay awake the whole night.

Strange to say, nothing came of Tao-ching's act of defiance. No one in the Sung family mentioned it. When she met the old landlord, he simply passed her with a scornful nod, while Sung Yu-pin was as amiable as ever — he even showed her greater respect. She could not understand the family's attitude but finally attributed it to Sung Yu-pin's good offices and began to think more highly of him. To her mind, he was not all bad but still had a conscience and was interested in study. However fantastic his ideas might be, he was better than his father, whose sole concern was to suck the last drop of blood from the wretched peasants.

The day after Tao-ching's championship of old Wang, Hsu Man-tun sought her out and warned her to be more careful and never to expose herself again. Conscious of her fault, she acted more warily. For days she did nothing but teach and copy manuscripts, scarcely leaving herself time to go for a stroll with Wen-tai. This gave her little chance of meeting Hsu and Cheng Teh-fu. Once, however, she came upon the latter in a side yard. She hesitated to accost him, and he ignored her. The encounter upset her, bringing in its wake many conflicting emotions, shame, and self-reproach, as well as self-righteous indignation. Moreover she could not tell from his melancholy expression whether he still hated her or not.

Her friendship with Aunty Chen had been growing steadily, however. She was now sure that the old woman would not betray her or take the side of the Sungs. So in the evenings Tao-ching tried to pass on to her some simple ideas about the class struggle. Aunty Chen could not understand all the academic terms Tao-ching used. Still, she said more than once:

"I know you're a kind-hearted girl — a good girl with a tender heart!"

Chapter 12

The approach of the wheat harvest meant extra work for the whole of the landlord's household, for the Sungs owned about two thousand *mou* of land. Masters and men went out to the fields early and came back late. They were so seldom at home that Tao-ching's work as a copyist was suspended.

Her mind was much occupied with the struggle the peasants were to launch. She knew that this just fight would be led by the Party, but had only a vague idea of the form a revolutionary struggle in the countryside would take. She hoped to learn something from Hsu Man-tun, but he was particularly busy these days. At last, however, after many strolls through the side yards, she came upon him when nobody else was about. Adjusting the white towel knotted round his head, he asked with a smile, "Busy, Miss Chang?"

His reproachful glance told her that he had not forgotten her recent recklessness. Her remorse was mingled with a certain self-satisfaction, and with a diffident glance at him she answered softly:

"I know I made a mistake the other day. . . . But that hasn't affected my relations with the Sungs. Now, how's the harvest struggle getting on? I'm completely in the dark. You know how anxious I am."

Hsu nodded with a smile. "It's no use being anxious. Just wait. Whatever happens, be careful not to appear different from other people, and don't forget your own job."

Though he said nothing specific about the coming fight, she sensed, from the purposeful look in his eyes, that the storm was about to break.

The Sungs' far-stretching fields were like a sea of gold, as the breeze ruffled the wheat under the scorching sun. Sung Kuei-tang, impervious to the heat, could be seen almost every day making his rounds of the fields with his guards, swearing if even a few ears of wheat were missing and savagely beating any famished peasants whom he caught pilfering.

The old landlord had sent farm hands to villages further afield to recruit harvesters. In the past, he had hired casual labour at a nominal wage, but this year the situation had changed. Men living nearby wanted four yuan a day, and refused to work for two, which was all he offered. The wheat was ripening fast and would rot in the fields unless soon harvested, so he had ordered Hsu Man-tun and some others to go out and find labour. Anxiety had made the old man more abusive than ever: he constantly rapped the ground with his stick. His son, either influenced by him or aware of the critical situation, joined in the work of supervision. Wearing a straw hat, he followed his father around till his fair, plump face was sunburned and his smile had disappeared.

One dark night during this period, when Hsu Man-tun and the rest were still away, a sudden din of beaten gongs broke out in the courtyard. This short, hurried warning threw the whole household into confusion. Tao-ching, who had been ready to go to bed, hurried out to ask what was wrong. A guard, climbing a ladder from her yard to the high wall of the main courtyard told her, "They're stealing the crops!"

Tao-ching's heart beat violently, and she had to check the urge to shout and laugh aloud. At last the struggle led by the Party had started! Peasants like Wang Lao-tseng and his grandchildren would have a few good meals at last! Nevertheless, for all her happiness she had no real idea how the peasants would set about taking the wheat which was rightly their own. As she stood there in a state of wild excitement, Sung Yu-pin and his father hurried past with the steward and a dozen armed guards. They scaled the high wall, their dark figures scarcely distinguishable in the starlight, but Tao-ching could faintly discern them training their guns upon some target outside.

The beating of gongs had stopped, all was still outside, and the guards up on the roof were also silent. There was no firing, no shouting. Tao-ching and some maids, gathered under the eaves, were holding their breath in suspense. For a second, time seemed to stand still.

Tao-ching tried to guess from the actions of the men on the wall how the struggle was going; but the guards laid down their weapons one after another, while some even began to smoke. Impatiently watching the red tips of their cigarettes, she decided to climb up to see for herself what was happening, and whispered to Aunty Chen who was next to her, "Aunty, let's go up there and see what's happening!"

"Old Mr. Sung doesn't allow women up there." The old servant sighed. "Well, you see how it is — the poor have their sufferings, the rich have their troubles too." With that she and two other maids went inside, leaving Tao-ching alone. As the side door was now open, she hit on a plan to get up on the roof. She ran to Sung Yu-pin's bedroom in the next yard, and seeing a light called through the window, "Are you in bed, Mrs. Sung?"

"Who's that?" asked a nervous voice.

"Chang Hsiu-lan!"

The door opened a little to reveal Mrs. Sung holding a big bundle wrapped in embroidered silk. Her face was ashy grey and her voice trembled as she asked, "What's happening? Is there any danger?"

"No." Tao-ching shook her head. "I came to ask you what it's all about."

"What else could it be but that rabble stealing our wheat! Old Mr. Sung is afraid they'll break in and start looting. So he and his men are all up on the roof."

"Can we go up and see what's happening?" Tao-ching caught hold of Mrs. Sung's thin arm.

"I can't!" She shrank back. "I must sort things out, just in case. . . ." When Tao-ching persisted, she said, "Well, go yourself then. You aren't afraid of Mr. Sung anyway."

With this permission, Tao-ching ran to the ladder and climbed quietly to the roof, almost forgetting, in her eagerness, that the landlord and his men were there.

The scene was a weird one. Thousands of lights, like stars winking in the sky, were flickering in the vast fields. Among these specks of light moved countless dark figures — not spirits or fireflies dancing in the breeze, but peasants battling fearlessly for their rights. Beside herself with joy, Tao-ching longed to shout, "Ah, our Party, how great you are!"

Her heart beating fast, her face flushed, she understood what was happening. The Party was leading the peasants to take the crops they had grown back to their own homes, so that the poor could taste the good steamed rolls usually enjoyed only by the rich.

Relieved and calmer, she was stepping forward when someone challenged her. It was Sung Yu-pin.

Her quiet voice did not falter, "It's Chang Hsiu-lan! Mr. Sung, can you tell me what's happened? I was worried and asked Mrs. Sung, but she didn't know. She told me to come up here and find out."

"Oh, it's nothing." Sung Yu-pin laid down his Mauser and took a deep breath. "Just people reaping our crops. Aren't you afraid, Miss Chang? Why not go back to bed?"

"No, I've never been afraid — they used to call me a tomboy. Are they really reaping your crops without your permission? What does it mean?"

Leaning against an embrasure of the wall, Sung glanced at the two guards in black by his side. "Even a worm will turn. . . ." He shook his head. "My father sometimes goes too far. . . ."

He was interrupted by a bellow of rage, and they all started at the sound of Sung Kuei-tang's voice.

"Go too far, do I? . . . You ungrateful puppy! You're the one who's spoilt these devils!" At last the old landlord had a chance to vent his fury. "A debtor must pay with money, a murderer with his life — this has been the rule since time immemorial. Any man who tills my land must pay me rent; any man who owes me money must settle the debt. Is this going too far? Don't all landowners do the same? Behind my back you let others take advantage of me, you fool! But does that stop them from robbing you in the end? . . . Look there!" He gestured with a clumsy hand towards the fields in the west, and roared, "There! . . . There! . . . They're

carting away my wheat . . . carrying it off!" Never before had Tao-ching heard such hatred in a voice.

She and Sung Yu-pin looked where the old landlord had pointed, and saw hundreds of shadows moving swiftly through the flickering lights. The well-organized peasants were reaping, carting and carrying away the fruits of their victory. Tao-ching felt indescribable joy and pride, but Sung Yu-pin's face was white, his eyes glazed with dismay. Looking from his father to her, he countered with a feeble grin:

"Don't blame me. The Reds are behind them. What can I do?"

"The Reds! . . ." So he knew the role of the Communist Party in this! Tao-ching had imagined that he was too academic to have any political understanding.

The old man banged the wall with the red-tasselled pistol which he had carried for years, and cut him short:

"You poor fool, you! You've studied law for nothing! Think of all the money I spent to keep you at college! Yet you let the Reds get away with this under your nose. . . . What a son I've brought up, worthless fool! . . ."

The landlord's stinging reproaches were a revelation to Tao-ching, up there on the roof in the darkness. As a matter of fact, she had been at the Sungs' for a month without fully understanding why she was sent there, and how important it was for her to keep on good terms with them in order to pass on to Hsu Man-tun anything she heard. This clash between father and son, in the midst of the conflict, made her realize that she too was in the front of the class struggle; not an onlooker but an active combatant. While looking around with an air of girlish surprise, she was paying the closest attention to what was said. But the tiff was soon over. In a businesslike tone the old landlord asked his son, "Are all the storerooms doubly locked? With the best English locks?"

"Yes. Don't worry."

Tao-ching moved a few steps away to look out over the fields as if absorbed by the sight.

"Heavens! They are worse than bandits!" raged the old landlord hoarsely. He called to his chief guard, "Hu! These brigands are busy stealing my crops now, but soon they may rush the house. . . . Watch out! There's no need to be polite — if they come, open fire!" Then he glared at Tao-ching and blustered, "Miss Chang, we employ you as a governess, not as a guard. What are you doing up here on the roof? Why aren't you in your room?"

Before Tao-ching could answer, Sung Yu-pin came to her rescue. "Miss Chang isn't an outsider, father. Her coming up here shows her concern for our family."

The old landlord frowned, as if to protest, "You always take her side." Then he sat down wearily on a stone.

As Sung Yu-pin showed no sign of wanting her to leave, Tao-ching stayed to watch what was going on outside.

The night was beautiful and cool; the scattered stars were glittering enchantingly all over the sky. Leaning against an embrasure, Tao-ching looked as innocent as a little girl. As she watched the western fields where most of the men and lights were concentrated, she was outwardly lost in appreciation of the scene, but was inwardly seething with excitement. She vainly tried to glimpse the illumined faces of the peasants so long oppressed, and longed to fly out of her cage and join the men now wielding their sickles in the fields. Angered by the thought that she could not leave the Sung household, she glanced round. The old landlord had gone, leaving his son to stare dejectedly down at the fields to the west.

There was a deep silence, not a dog barked, as Tao-ching looked towards the dim light in the east. She leaned against the wall and yawned, exhausted. Suddenly a roar of anger sent the guards on the roof scattering in all directions. Tao-ching whirled round to see the old landlord stretching out trembling arms as he cried, "All gone! All my wheat . . . tens of thousands of catties — finished!" He was shaking so violently that even his raucous voice quavered.

In the pale glimmer of dawn, she could see that the twinkling lights had vanished. The fields stretched bare and huge, like a giant sleeping soundly after heavy labour. Wheat and reapers had gone.

"Finished . . . this is the end!" The old man's voice faded away. Sung Yu-pin and the guards, who had gathered round to support him, were staring at his furrowed, livid face. With a fearful cry, "My wheat!" he collapsed into his son's arms.

Sung Yu-pin knelt down and clasped his father's head, crying, "Father! Wake up! . . . Wake up!" The next instant he was wailing, "Father! Your unfilial son will take revenge! I swear it!"

"Revenge?" Tao-ching shuddered and glanced at Sung Yu-pin, hardly able to believe her ears. When she heard him repeat his bloodthirsty oath, her knees trembled as if she were personally guilty of some crime. She hurried back to her room, threw herself on the *kang* and covered her head with the quilt.

Chapter 13

The next morning the old landlord kept to his bed, and Sung Yu-pin ordered Cheng Teh-fu to drive him to town to see that vengeance was done. Cheng was the only carter available. He had not been sent away with all the others because he looked such a fool. Hearing that his son had gone to the county government for help, the old landlord's spirit rose and he started to get better. Tao-ching, however, was worried and at a loss. She wondered, "What sort of revenge will they take? The peasants have hidden the wheat and not one was caught — the whole action was carried out brilliantly. What can the Sungs do when they can't be sure who took their wheat?" She was afraid for the peasants and hated herself for doubting Hsu Man-tun and for thinking that Sung Yu-pin was unlike his father, that he was kind and benevolent but held back by his family. How naive and childish she had been! Sung Yu-pin was away for three days, and for two nights she lay awake bitterly regretting her own shortcomings. She realized that her political level was far lower than that of Hsu Man-tun, Cheng Teh-fu and many others. She felt a foreboding, too, that Wang Lao-tseng might be arrested, and then what would become of his two grandchildren? The day after the wheat was reaped, she had taken Wen-tai for a walk in the fields, inwardly rejoicing to see that all the golden ears had gone. Suddenly Little Tiger came up with a crate of firewood on his back, and greeted her with a smile. When he saw that Wen-tai had gone to catch dragon-flies, he took a large white steamed roll from his crate and thrust it into her hands. He did not say a word, but the rapturous look in his eyes set her blood racing. Yes, instead of feeling demoralized, she should fight to the last for children such as these. This decision reached, and despite her uneasiness, she forced herself to get closer to the Sungs. She would go to inquire after the old landlord or help Mrs. Sung by fetching physicians and brewing herbal medicines. She also became more friendly with warm-hearted Aunty Chen. Unfortunately Hsu Man-tun had been sent out again with the others to harvest crops a considerable distance away, and Tao-ching had to wait as patiently as she could for his return. On the afternoon of the fourth day after the peasants' action, Sung Yu-pin came back in Cheng Teh-fu's cart, and although feeling very nervous Tao-ching went boldly to his room to offer the customary greetings.

"Many thanks, Miss Chang, for taking such good care of my father during my absence. I am really most obliged. . . ." His plump face bore the traces of sun and wind, and his smile was as affable as ever. Had he really gone to town to avenge his father? Tao-ching thought it more probable that he had done nothing at all.

"Mr. Sung, did you go into town just on account of the wheat?" She made the question as casual as she could.

Sung puffed at his cigarette and cast a glance at his wife and daughter before looking at Tao-ching and sighing.

"What could I do but make a trip to appease the old man? Well, what's done is done. The wheat isn't all that important. The peasants are really hard pressed."

Having been deceived once, she no longer believed such glib talk but, pretending to do so, she remarked, "I haven't done any work on your manuscripts for several days, Mr. Sung. Shall I go on with them, now that you're back?"

"Yes, please." He stood up and nodded polite acquiescence. "Has anything been happening here? How are the peasants doing? Are they better off now?"

That reminded her of the white steamed roll which Little Tiger had slipped into her hand. She thought, "Better off? How can they be better off until the class you belong to has been destroyed?" But all she said was, "I'm afraid I don't know. I haven't been out much these last few days."

Sung Yu-pin nodded benignly, then took her to his study, handed her some manuscripts and left her there. She worked patiently for two hours.

After supper she went out, hoping to find Hsu Man-tun and tell him about recent developments, or to learn something from Cheng Teh-fu about Mr. Sung's latest activities. She found Cheng at the well, watering the animals for Hsu, who had not yet returned. Oddly enough, his attitude to her had changed. There was anxiety instead of hatred in the lustreless eyes he fixed on her in the twilight. He glanced around several times as if wanting to speak, and stopped working the windlass.

Tao-ching understood. Calling Wen-tai's name as if she were looking for him, she hurried over to the well and whispered, "What is it, uncle?"

Cheng Teh-fu nodded and looked around. Turning the windlass again, he blurted out, "Go away quickly, lass! Sung Yu-pin has it in for you. He's got a black-list with your name on it, and your photograph as well. He says you're a Red. You must hurry! Run away tonight!"

Hardly yet awake to her danger, Tao-ching was touched by his genuine concern, and stepped up to him and took his arm. Looking steadily into his face, she asked breathlessly, "Don't you hate me any more, uncle?"

"Don't waste time talking!" He pushed her away. "Save yourself first!"

Tao-ching returned to her room to rest for a while. She had no time to marvel at Cheng Teh-fu's change of heart. With implicit faith in him she wondered: "What shall I do? Run away at once? No, this involves other people too. I can't just give up the task assigned to me. What shall I do?" It was dark, and with a troubled mind she lay on the *kang* till it occurred to her: "If Sung Yu-pin knows who I am, he's probably found out about some others too. Didn't Cheng Teh-fu say there was a black-list? If only I could get hold of it and hand it over to the Party!" The thought made her excited and put an end to her fears, leaving her as buoyant as when she decided to post up Lu Chia-chuan's leaflets. She was just about to run out joyfully when she whirled round and plumped back on to the *kang*, a fleeting smile of self-mockery on her lips. It wasn't going to be so simple this time. She had no idea where to search!

She lay puzzling over the way to find the black-list, rejecting each new idea as impractical. Should she get Hsiao-su to steal it? No, that wouldn't do. Or ask help from Aunty Chen? The old woman might not dare undertake such a risky job. . . . While she was racking her brains, somebody lifted the door curtain and entered. It was Aunty Chen.

"Haven't you gone to sleep yet?" she asked in a low voice. "Why haven't you a light?" She struck a match and lit the lamp.

Tao-ching sat up and looked at Aunty Chen, opened her mouth, but did not know what to say. At last she managed to ask, "Why are you back so early today, aunty? Where are Mr. and Mrs. Sung?"

"Oh, they've gone in to see old Mr. Sung. Heaven only knows what's keeping them there so long. Hsiao-su is doing her embroidery; Wen-tai must be playing in somebody's room. I took the chance to come and see you. Why did you eat so little rice today? Are you feeling out of sorts?"

An idea flashed through Tao-ching's mind. She was sure the black-list must be in Mrs. Sung's bedroom. Here was a chance she could not afford to let slip.

"Aunty, there are mosquitoes in here," she said. "Do you mind lighting some mosquito-incense for me? I have something to say to Hsiao-su. I'll be back in a minute." With that she hurried away.

Standing outside the young landlord's room, she called several times without any response. She went straight in. Nobody was there. She was much more nervous now than she had been over the leaflets. The dim paraffin lamp looked like a big eye fixed malevolently on her, its reflections in the red cabinet and hardwood furniture seemed as bright as searchlights to her. But though her knees trembled, she took heart at the thought that she was fighting for truth, and for the happiness of the oppressed. In a few seconds she felt calmer, and having made sure that no one was about, she turned up the lamp and began her search. On the table were some documents which, unfolded, proved to be I.O.U.s, title-deeds and mortgages. With a shudder of aversion, she carefully replaced them, pulled out a drawer . . . then to her horror steps sounded outside and in came Aunty Chen.

Tao-ching stood as calmly as she could by the bedroom door, but her unwarranted intrusion into the room could not but arouse the suspicions of the old woman, who looked her up and down and said anxiously:

"What's the matter, girl? . . . Why? . . ." She did not finish, but her meaning was clear. Now that there was no other way out, Tao-ching caught hold of the old servant's jacket and said:

"Aunty, Sung Yu-pin wants to have me killed! Will you help me?"

"What? Wants to have you killed?" Aunty Chen seized Tao-ching's arm and her face turned pale, but before the girl could explain she dragged her outside, saying, "Let's talk in your room."

They returned to Tao-ching's room, panting as if after a narrow escape, and Tao-ching told the elder woman:

"This afternoon when Mr. Sung came back, I went in to see him. There was a photograph lying on his table. Guess what it was, aunty! It was my photograph! And there was a piece of paper beside it with my name on it. The truth of it is, he's planning to brand me as a Communist!"

"Brand you as a Communist! What a man. . . . But how could he let you see it?"

"I don't know. When I went in, Mrs. Sung wasn't there and he was so taken up with his reading that he didn't notice me. I just caught a glimpse of it before he turned round. I went back just now to try and find that paper to make sure. If the name on it is really mine. . . . How can he do such a dreadful thing to me, aunty?"

Aunty Chen kept silent, her head bent, her arms motionless by her sides. After a while she looked up at Tao-ching, who was sitting by her.

"I'll tell you something, child. You discovered, didn't you, that I was spying on you when you first came here? That was on the orders of Mr. Sung and the mistress. She was afraid her husband might take a fancy to you, and he told me to find out what kind of girl you were and what you did when alone in your room. The mistress stopped worrying when I told her you were an honest girl. But not he! He may look agreeable and respectable, but what he does outside this house doesn't bear repeating. When he tires of one girl, he just throws her away. He has money, you know, and also an artful way with him. That's why even his wife and father don't know what he's up to. He must have taken a fancy to you, because he's always asking me about you. Now he means to ruin you, eh? . . ." She broke off to think. Then with a laugh she touched Tao-ching's soft, cold cheek. "He must have lost his temper because you didn't rise to his bait. . . . Or maybe you're wrong. Maybe your eyes played a trick on you?"

As she listened, Tao-ching thought the matter over again. Now she said in a low voice, "It's possible, aunty. But if he really wants to harm me, you're the only one who can help me. You wouldn't see me condemned to death without lifting a finger, would you? They say the Kuomintang shoot all Communists without exception!"

"Well, tell me what it looks like . . . I'll try to find it for you," promised Aunty Chen.

This welcome offer of help was to be expected from a worker like Aunty Chen. Tao-ching glanced at her kind, horror-stricken face and thought, "After all, she's one of the world's toilers!"

Aunty Chen returned a quarter of an hour later with a photograph of Tao-ching and a paper with the names of suspected "Reds". More than a dozen names were listed, but the only three Tao-ching knew were Chiang Hua's, Hsu Man-tun's and her own.

She quickly invented an excuse. "Aunty, this paper is full of false charges. I must read it carefully so that I can defend myself if I'm taken to court. Do you mind standing guard for me? You shall have it back in a minute."

"Let me put it back now before they find out!" begged the other. "I'll be done for if they know what I've been up to!"

Ignoring this protest, Tao-ching took pen and paper and in a couple of minutes had copied down all the names. After checking them, she handed back the original with a light heart. The old servant did not leave at once, however, but put one hand on Tao-ching's arm, shedding tears as though the girl were already on her way to gaol.

"Are you sure? . . . Does that scoundrel really want to kill you? I believe it now, all you said about landlords being devils. . . ."

Tao-ching nodded, saying nothing. The other wiped her eyes and hurried away.

After this nerve-racking episode, Tao-ching sat down to reflect on her next move. The list was in her hands, but she had no time to study it. It was important to hand it over to the Party at once. Hsu Man-tun had told her that if she could not find him, she must go to Mr. Wang. Cheng Teh-fu's warning was still fresh in her ears, and she began to realize the full extent of her danger. She looked at Aunty Chen's room opposite, and felt sorry to be leaving such a good friend; but she could not explain the reason for her sudden flight. Aunty Chen, having come back to reassure Tao-ching, retired to her own room, thus giving the girl a chance to put her things in order. The side door to the main courtyard was locked, but she tiptoed out to see if the coast was clear, then made her way to Hsu's hut where Cheng was staying, and softly called his name.

The old farm hand came out and whispered in the darkness, "Haven't you gone yet? Go now, before the second watch!"

"I'm going, uncle. I'm so indebted to you! Sung Yu-pin does have my photograph. . . . Can you tell me, please, the best way to Tachen Village? I want to find someone there."

Instead of giving her directions, he urged her, "Hurry up! Anything you want to take? Let's get started."

"Do you mean to come with me?" She was overjoyed. "Then wait a minute while I fetch something."

She went back to her room, took up a small bundle and tucked the black-list into an inner pocket. She then went to Aunty Chen's door, but all was quiet inside. It was sad to think that she might never again see this lonely old woman, with whom she had been on good terms for almost a month, and who had rendered her such a signal service. There was no time to loiter, so she slipped away and opend the front door. There she bumped into Aunty Chen.

The elder woman took her hand as if she understood everything, and whispered:

"Are you going to run away? Why didn't you tell me? Go quickly while they're still asleep."

Tao-ching threw her arms round the other's shoulders, and her tears dampened the old servant's clothes.

Chapter 14

Tao-ching and Cheng Teh-fu passed through the side yard and made their way out of the compound by a small gate. They hurried cautiously through the fields for about five *li* till they reached a rutted cart track where Tao-ching stopped.

"Go back now, uncle," she said. "I can find the way."

Instead of answering, the old man strode energetically forward, pulling her with him. After helping her over a large puddle, he explained:

"I'm going with you. How could I stay on with the Sungs now?"

Tao-ching began to understand. Having warned her of her danger, he had no choice but to run away. She drew closer to him, no longer troubled by his rank smell of sweat.

"Uncle, how can I ever thank you? You've been so kind to me!"

He was as blunt as ever. "That's no way to talk!" The slow, terse rebuke went to her heart.

They strode on silently through the slumbering fields. In the velvet darkness a cool breeze caressed the damp sorghum leaves, the rustling poplars, the glinting river, and Tao-ching's pretty face which was flushed with excitement. It was one of those enchanting summer nights when stars twinkled and grasshoppers, crickets, cicadas and frogs kept up a cheerful chorus in the lush grass, on the trees and along the banks of the pond. The boundless fields in their sleepy tranquility were lovelier than by day. The green crops, the murmuring river, the highway winding into the distance under the canopy of the dark sky, the wild flowers and foliage diffusing fragrance, the refreshing, intoxicating air, and still more, the legendary quality of the revolutionary struggle — made this night a thrilling night to Tao-ching. She was soon her old self again, heedless of danger. She took a deep breath of fresh air. It was on the tip of her tongue to call to Cheng Teh-fu, "Isn't it beautiful, uncle! And isn't life splendid!" But she was checked by the memory of the time when she had fled to Peitaiho three years before. Then identical sensations had overpowered her at her first sight of the sea, making her exclaim to the porter, "Oh, look! Isn't it lovely!" His reply had been significant, "What's lovely about it? If we catch no fish and have nothing to eat, scenery doesn't count for much." So thinking, she looked at the ragged old farm hand who was plodding by her side. "A typical petty-bourgeois reaction!" she scolded herself. "Will you never get rid of these romantic notions and become as sane as the workers and peasants? . . ." In a different mood now, she quickened her pace, turning her mind to more immediate problems. Would they succeed in finding Mr. Wang? Could they warn those whose names were on the list in time? And how about herself? . . . The beauties of the night entirely forgotten, she concentrated on keeping up with her companion.

Cheng Teh-fu strode on ahead, not speaking a word. When they had gone a dozen *li* or more, Tao-ching broke the silence to ask:

"Uncle, how did you know that Sung Yu-pin had my photograph and meant trouble?"

A few paces further on, Cheng Teh-fu replied:

"I drove him first to the Shentse county government, then to the Kuomintang headquarters; from there he ordered me to drive to the Tinghsien county government and Kuomintang headquarters. After that he went to the primary school outside the East Gate. . . ."

"To the primary school!" echoed Tao-ching in surprise.

"Yes. And a fat man there named Wu went back with him to the Kuomintang headquarters. I overheard them talking in the cart. Wu told Sung you must be Lin Tao-ching who once taught in their school. When I heard your name. . . ." He turned to scrutinize her as if to make sure of her identity before continuing, "I listened carefully to what they said next. At first, Sung didn't quite believe Wu, not till the fat man showed him your photograph. I leaned back to ask for a light and saw it clearly. It was you, no mistake. . . ." Breaking off suddenly, he pulled Tao-ching off the road to take cover in the damp field among the crops.

"Is someone coming?" Tao-ching's heart was pounding.

Cheng Teh-fu held up a hand to silence her. Like a seasoned hunter, he cocked his head to listen and nodded. Then gently but firmly he pushed Tao-ching down. With a glance at his

kindly, anxious face, she did as he wanted, reflecting, "They call him Cheng the Idiot. But how alert and able he is!"

On the first and the fifteenth day,
The temple gate opened wide!
The Ox-Head and Horse-Face demons
Stood there in full view inside! . . .

The man whose swift footsteps could be heard approaching was singing a popular song. Cheng Teh-fu pulled Tao-ching to her feet and bounded back to the road as abruptly as he had left it.

"Man-tun, you rascal!" he called out cheerfully.

Hsu Man-tun was so pleased by this unexpected meeting that he caught both Tao-ching and Cheng Teh-fu by the hand.

"Why, is something wrong? What does this mean? . . . I didn't expect things to come to a head so soon."

Tao-ching gave him a brief account of what had happened, and then handed him the list of names.

"I'd never have got this but for Aunty Chen," she said.

Hsu read the names and remarked, "We expected some dirty work, when that scoundrel Sung Yu-pin went to town, but we didn't know he'd get this list so quickly with the help of the reactionaries of both counties. I was going back to make sure you were all right; but here you are. Let's all go to see Mr. Wang."

"Have you come from him, then?" asked Tao-ching anxiously.

"Yes!" Hsu nodded, smiling shrewdly. "One of your friends is there, and asked after you."

"Who's that?" she asked, happy yet strangely apprehensive.

"Let's talk on the way." Hsu turned and started off.

They proceeded westward towards Tachen Village. The two men walked so fast that Tao-ching could barely keep up and was too breathless to repeat her question. "Is it Chiang Hua?" she wondered. "Or could it be Lu Chia-chuan? He may have been released from prison and come here to lead the local Party work. . . ." Lu Chia-chuan's sturdy, active figure rose before her again. Tao-ching always remembered Lu Chia-chuan when she was in a crisis, and as she thought of him now her heart filled with pain and longing not unmixed with joy.

They reached Mr. Wang's house in the small hours of the morning. It was the home of a well-to-do middle peasant, but the whole family from the grandfather to the children were devoted supporters of the Communist Party. There was a light in a small room in the back courtyard; and there, to her surprise, Tao-ching saw Chiang Hua and Aunt Li as well as two strangers whom she guessed must belong to the movement.

Tao-ching clasped the elder woman's hands, but had eyes for none but Chiang Hua. It was barely two months since they parted but it seemed much longer, for the struggle had drawn them close together. Tao-ching was too happy to speak, and it was Chiang Hua who said to her with a smile:

"You're lucky! Escaping from real danger again!"

Indicating Cheng Teh-fu, who was sitting on a bench in silence smoking, she said, "He and Aunty Chen, an old servant in the Sung household, were the ones who saved me. Isn't it strange how we always meet someone kind, who turns bad luck into good?"

Everybody present burst out laughing. Even Mr. Wang, generally so solemn, chuckled. Then Hsu Man-tun said, "Here's the black-list. The situation is critical. Shall we discuss what to do?"

Chiang Hua glanced round thoughtfully and said, "True, things are critical. But revolutionaries expect that under the White terror. I think the rest of us can consider that problem presently. Let's first solve the problem of these two, the old and the young." He motioned towards Cheng Teh-fu and Tao-ching. "It's impossible for her to stay here. I'm in favour of her going back to Peiping. As for Uncle Cheng, we'll find him a job elsewhere."

Cheng Teh-fu said nothing, but Tao-ching exclaimed in surprise, "I'm to go to Peiping?"

"Yes. You go back to Peiping," Chiang Hua replied firmly. "It's comparatively easy for you to work underground there. Remember the saying, stick to the green hills and you'll never go short of fuel."

Somewhat dashed, Tao-ching was silent for a while, then raised her head to say:

"Please let me stay here! I want to fight in the countryside with you."

No one spoke, but Aunt Li patted her hand and said coaxingly, "We're in a tight corner now, child. You'd better go to Peiping as Chiang Hua says."

Looking at the calm, decided faces round her, the girl pondered for a moment and then gave a nod.

Chiang Hua stepped quietly up to her and whispered, "When you reach Peiping, call on Hsu Hui. Here's a letter to give to her. If you can't find her, destroy it. . . ." He thought for a little time before continuing, "It seems to me you've made quick progress in these two months. You did well in getting this list. Go on doing your best. Remember, many, many tests and hardships are needed before you become a genuine revolutionary."

A naive, irrepressible smile lit up Tao-ching's face on hearing this encouragement and advice. But her gladness quickly gave way to concern for Chiang Hua. She asked anxiously, "You've been around here all the time since we parted, haven't you?"

He nodded, smiling.

"What will *you* do?" she asked solicitously.

"Don't worry about him, Miss Governess! Comrade Chiang knows how to take care of himself!" Hsu Man-tun's remark set the others laughing again.

It was dawn, and Mr. Wang's mule-cart was ready. While he was giving the driver directions about taking Tao-ching to Chengting to catch the train, she stood under a locust tree in the courtyard talking to Cheng Teh-fu, who was also preparing to leave.

"Uncle, I shall never forget you," she declared. "I'm going now and I don't know when we'll meet again, but I must put my mind at rest and ask you once more: Do you still hate me?"

Cheng Teh-fu knocked out his pipe, and a faint smile passed over his dark, wrinkled face as he answered, "You're not Lin Po-tang's daughter now, but a girl devoted to the revolution. How could I hate you? If I did before — don't take offence — it's the Communist Party that put that right."

Although Tao-ching had been aware that his attitude had changed, his words delighted her.

"You see," he proceeded, "your mother's people were from my village. I knew both her and her father. How could I help doing what I could for you?"

"You really are a good sort, uncle! I was quite wrong about you." She laughed. "But won't you tell me where Hei-ni is? How is she?"

The look of pleasure on the old man's face disappeared and his features hardened. He stared blankly at her, his pipe dropped from his hands.

"Why, uncle, what's the matter?" Quickly offering her arm to the trembling old man, Tao-ching found herself trembling too.

There was no reply. The first rays of daylight showed that his haggard face had turned a ghastly white and two big tears were rolling down his cheeks. He caught her by the hand and quavered, "Hei-ni's gone, lass! Her mother-in-law did for her long ago. . . ."

"No! . . . Poor Hei-ni! . . ." Clutching his arm, Tao-ching burst into tears. The vision of her lovely, nimble childhood friend touched her more deeply now than ever before. Wiping away her tears, she consoled Cheng Teh-fu as best she could. "Uncle, don't be so distressed. When . . . when things are better, you must come and stay with me." A sob nearly choked her, but she felt that she had to know one more thing. "And where is Aunty Cheng?"

The old man's face was contorted with pain and despair. Dry-eyed now, he answered her from between clenched teeth.

"Dead! When I was out working in the fields, your father raped her. She . . . hanged herself!"

Tao-ching was utterly dumbfounded. Many minutes passed and in a daze she heard Hsu Man-tun's voice, "It's time for the governess to go!" She was vaguely aware of Chiang Hua's eager eyes on her, as if urging her to leave quickly and not to give way to her feelings. Aunt Li took her arm to help her into the cart and Mr. Wang put a roll of banknotes into her hand. Conscious of all this, she still could not utter a word. The pain she felt was choking her, and she could not express all the shame, remorse and contrition in her heart. The next thing she knew was that she was in the cart . . . the curtain was lowered . . . the driver cracked his whip and shouted at the mule . . . her eyes were misted over. The lovable, smiling face of Hei-ni, the kind, friendly expression of her mother, the bowed, grief-stricken figure of Cheng Teh-fu — all were before her as the cart jolted along. "Make up to him for the wrong done. . . ." Now Hsu Man-tun's words took on a different meaning.

"Of course you hated me, uncle . . . how could you help it? Ah, Lin Po-tang, Sung Yu-pin, Sung Kuei-tang, Wu Yu-tien . . . we must rid the world of blood-sucking, man-eating monsters like you!" At last she had given expression to her feelings, but no one heard her cry.

Chapter 15

It was the darkest time of night, just before dawn. The rumbling Peiping-Hankow express was speeding over the vast North China plain. In the dimly lit third-class carriage all the passengers except Tao-ching were asleep, lying in cramped positions. She was sitting in a dark corner, eyes closed, and immersed in thought. Now and then she would open her eyes to see if anyone was watching her. The next minute her mind would revert back again to gloomy thoughts.

She looked through the window at the dark open country, and the twinkling stars on the horizon seemed to gradually take the form of many little heads. She recalled the brave, high-minded school-children at Tinghsien and her many stirring experiences while in the home of Sung Yu-pin. . . . Where could Cheng Teh-fu, whom she admired so much, have gone? She hoped Wang Lao-tseng and his grandchildren were not being persecuted. Although she had only met the old man once, his plight had made an indelible impression on her. She also saw in her mind's eye unhappy Hei-ni and her mother, with Hsiu-ni, her own mother. . . . Watching the dark fields flashing past, she sighed in spite of herself. Feeling in her pocket for the letter which Chiang Hua had asked her to pass on to Hsu Hui, she mused, "What if I can't find her? . . ."

Then she turned from unhappy reflections to consider more practical problems.

"Whom shall I first call upon in Peiping? Where can I stay? I can hardly call on Hsiao-yen after what happened, and Chiang Hua said I mustn't go straight to Hsu Hui. He's right! But what if I run into Hu Meng-an? . . ." Hu's repulsive face had haunted her ever since she boarded the train. This was quite different from her first trip to Peiping from Peitaiho. The secret service would now always be on her heels, but she must go to Peiping whatever the danger there in order to get in touch with Hsu Hui. . . . As she sat thinking, her heavy eyelids closed.

The train rattled and clattered along. She fell asleep at last, overcome by the stress and strain of the past four days.

The train arrived in Peiping that afternoon, and carrying her simple luggage, Tao-ching stepped out of the carriage and joined the noisy crowd. She had only walked a few steps when a shrill voice called:

"Little Lin, Lin Tao-ching!" At the same time a soft, perfumed arm encircled her shoulders. A smartly dressed woman, heavily made up and wearing pearl ear-rings, was embracing her and nodding to her with a friendly smile.

"Well, Little Lin, don't you know me?"

Tao-ching felt stunned.

"Oh, it's you, Pai Li-ping! I scarcely recognized you."

"Don't be silly!" Pai Li-ping flushed. "Just because I'm better dressed? I knew you the moment I saw you, even from a distance." She looked Tao-ching up and down as she hurried her along. "I was just seeing a friend off. Well, fancy meeting you here! Sometimes, you know, I can't help thinking of old friends. There was something romantic about our life in those days. . . . By the way, Little Lin, I haven't asked where you've come from or what you've been doing all this time."

Tao-ching looked curiously at her former friend whose lips were a deep carmine, and whose arched eyebrows were delicately pencilled. Perfume wafted from her light gauzy gown, and ear-rings swayed beside her powdered cheeks. This frivolous coquette was not the Pai Li-ping of her student days, and Tao-ching felt so ill at ease with her that she gave absent-minded answers to her questions.

"What have I been doing? I've been teaching in a primary school in the country."

Pai Li-ping raised her arched brows in astonishment.

"Teaching in the country? Isn't that terribly hard? What's become of your old man, Yu Yung-tse?"

"We separated long ago."

"Not really? So much the better. I never had any use for him."

Chatting as they walked, they were soon outside the station. Tao-ching was about to say goodbye when Pai Li-ping grasped her arm, saying, "Little Lin, we haven't seen each other for years, we must have a long chat. Let me treat you to a dinner! You haven't eaten anything on the train, have you?"

"Oh, no. . . ." Tao-ching, unwilling to call her Sister Pai, hardly knew how to address her. "I'm not at all hungry and I've a lot to do. I'll come and look you up some other time."

"Oh, no, you don't!" said Pai Li-ping, giving her a playful slap. "If you're through with your old man, why be such a stick-in-the-mud?" She immediately called two rickshas, pushed the protesting Tao-ching into one, got into the other, and told the ricksha-men to take them to Chiehying, the largest Western-style restaurant in Peiping.

Pai Li-ping ordered two table d'hôte dinners and they chatted as they ate. Tao-ching learned that her old schoolmate had joined a Shanghai film studio, had acted in two films, and then become the mistress of the manager. She was living in luxury, but from time to time she tired of such an existence and thought of her old life and former friends.

"How are Yu Yi-min and Wang Chien-fu now?" Tao-ching asked.

"Yu Yi-min!" Pai Li-ping smiled. "You can't imagine what a nuisance he's been! Like a blue-bottle buzzing about me all the time. If I go to Shanghai, he follows me there. If I go to Nanking, he comes after me. Whenever he takes a drop too much, he bombards me with verses about love, hate, souls and tears . . . it's too ridiculous! He lives in a garret and comes to borrow money when he's hard up. But though he's a dreadful nuisance, I'm sorry for him. As for Wang Chien-fu, well, he's become a government official, very self-important and self-satisfied. The anarchist who was for doing away with the government is now its willing tool — a mandarin! Once I met him in Nanking, arm in arm with a fashionable lady, but he cut me dead, and I didn't trouble to greet him! That leaves only Hsu Ning. Do you know he's been arrested and imprisoned? My gracious! When I went to see him the other day, I found him dressed like a convict, and his hair was cropped. That smart lad — you should see what they've done to him." She gave Tao-ching a charming smile and added, "Little Lin, do you know that I was in love with him once? Even now I still have a soft spot in my heart for him, and Ta-fang has been very jealous. It's a pity our good times together are ended. By the way, what about Lu Chia-chuan? You must surely be lovers by now?"

Tao-ching blushed. So many cherished memories and pent-up feelings had sprung to life at Pai Li-ping's casual remark. She replied gently:

"It's more than a year now since he was arrested. . . ."

"What, was he arrested too? I *am* sorry! These revolutionaries. . . ." Despite her surprise, she left the sentence unfinished, turning round to call to the waiter in English:

"Boy! Two cups of cocoa!" Dabbing her rouged lips with a filmy handkerchief, she smiled in a rather calculating way. "Tell me, Little Lin, are you married?"

"No."

"Have you got a young man?"

"No." Though some of Tao-ching's past feeling for Pai Li-ping had returned as they talked, she felt too uncomfortable to behave quite naturally and cordially in her presence.

Pai Li-ping patted her shoulder and with a ripple of laughter said, "Little Lin, how peculiar you are! I can't do without a man for a single day. . . . Let me find you a good husband so that you can enjoy life a bit."

Tao-ching smiled but made no reply. Having drunk her cocoa, she rose to leave; but Pai Li-ping pulled her back. "You silly child! It's not often we have the chance to see each other, and I'll be leaving for Shanghai in a day or two. Why not come home with me and have a good time? Tomorrow we can go and see Hsu Ning. . . . You've no lover waiting for you, so what's the hurry?"

"Where are you living now?" asked Tao-ching casually.

"At Li Tung Hotel. My husband isn't with me. So let's go there and have a good chat."

"No, thanks. I've some urgent business with a relative. I'll come some other day." With this resolute refusal, Tao-ching picked up her bag and was about to depart.

"No, I won't let you go!" Pai Li-ping snatched the bag from her hand, and grasping her arm walked her out of the restaurant. She called two rickshas without asking what the fare would be, and made Tao-ching take one of them. As they set off, she laughed at her friend's displeasure and called out, "Little Lin, we've been friends through thick and thin; in the past we were like sisters. . . . Don't you trust me any more? Cheer up! Come with me and I promise to give you a good time."

Tao-ching made no reply. She checked an angry impulse to jump off the ricksha. After all Pai Li-ping had once been in the movement and knew many of her revolutionary friends, besides, she was kind and warm-hearted. Her anger subsided as these thoughts ran through her mind.

Pai Li-ping had a luxurious suite on the first floor of the Li Tung Hotel, but Tao-ching, seated on the cool, handsome leather sofa, felt nothing but discomfort. "It's like a dream. How could I come to such a place?" she was asking herself, when her friend called from the bathroom:

"Come on, Little Lin! Come and tidy yourself a bit!"

Tao-ching stood up and replied, "No, I'm going out for a while. I'll soon be back."

"Wait a bit!" begged Pai Li-ping, running out to bar her way. She had put on a gorgeous white silk dressing-gown. Pushing Tao-ching back on to the sofa, she pinched her cheek lightly and said mischievously, "Don't be silly, Little Lin! I'm not letting you go." Looking her up and down again, she added, "Why, with a face like yours you could steal the heart of any man. Yet you choose to be so prim! You're in love with the revolution, I suppose, otherwise why should you be living such a hard life?"

"Don't talk nonsense!" countered Tao-ching hastily. "I've long broken with those revolutionaries. All I think of now is how to earn a living. . . . I've really something urgent to do. Please excuse me for a while." Once more she rose from her seat.

But once more Pai Li-ping pushed her back, to retort with a smile, "You're being silly again! There's no deceiving me with your childish lies. I've seen a good deal of the world, and I'm no fool. At your age I was just as enthusiastic as you about the proletarian revolution. What petty-bourgeois intellectual hasn't dreamed of becoming a revolutionary? As time went on I began to face up to facts. Of course, communism isn't a bad thing, but it's too vague an ideal and too distant a goal. When will a communist society be realized? When will the revolution be victorious? Besides, you're always in danger of being arrested and having your head cut off! If you're lucky enough to escape that, you have to submit to iron discipline and obey the leadership unconditionally. . . . That's why I got out of it all."

Pai Li-ping sighed softly and after a pause added, "What's life anyway, I should like to know? Why not enjoy it while we can? I've stopped wasting time building castles in the air, and I've no ambitions whatever. I'm just out to enjoy myself while I'm still young. Oh, Little Lin, I can tell by the way you dress, behave and talk that you're still under the spell. . . . I feel sorry for you, I really do!"

She flung her arms around Tao-ching and whispered eagerly: "Little Lin, though I'm no revolutionary now, I'm certainly not a counter-revolutionary. I simply advise you to find a good husband while you're young and get what pleasure you can out of life. Where is all this hustling and bustling going to get you? It's all to no purpose! Well, does my advice still grate on your ears? Some day you'll realize I'm right."

Tao-ching did her best to listen patiently while Pai Li-ping talked about her philosophy of life. It sounded faintly familiar, and suddenly she remembered that Chen Wei-ju, a good friend of her middle-school days, had given her similar advice years before. The difference was that Chen Wei-ju had married without ever joining the revolution, while Pai Li-ping had withdrawn from it to become a rich man's mistress. How ridiculous and contemptible it was to imagine that marriage was the only way open to Chinese women! But calming herself, she said seriously:

"Li-ping, it's good of you to think of me. I don't believe, though, happiness really depends on a husband. Can material comfort make up for a spiritual vacuum? I wish you'd get rid of this idea of depending on someone else for happiness, and learn to stand on your own feet. Why don't you do something useful by acting in some decent films?" Tao-ching was far more experienced now than when she had argued with Chen Wei-ju and was able to keep her temper and reason sincerely and with tact.

Astute Pai Li-ping lost no time in changing her tune when she saw that Tao-ching was in earnest.

"Well, Little Lin," she said, "I agree with you there. Chinese films nowadays are all modelled on Hollywood productions; so most of them are trashy or pornographic. I often dream of acting in some progressive film or a play with a meaning. It's a pity good plays are so rare!" She heaved a deep sigh, as if her worldliness was entirely due to the lack of good scenarios.

There was a short silence, then Tao-ching, realizing that she could not get away, asked for news of Hsu Ning. She had lost touch with this one-time "brother" after her arrest.

"Hsu Ning?" said Pai Li-ping, stroking her friend's hand. "He's a good lad. But, like you, he doesn't trust me any more. When I went to see him the other day, I purposely put on a plain blue cotton gown. But he . . . how shall I put it? He's changed. I don't blame him, poor thing. He asked after you. Maybe the two of you. . . ." She threw a kindly glance at Tao-ching and left the sentence unfinished.

Tao-ching made as if to slap her, retorting with a laugh:

"You're an old hand at match-making. Can you think of nothing else?"

Just then the door opened and in walked a young woman and three men, all dressed in Western style. Pai Li-ping drew Tao-ching to her feet and introduced her in an easy, natural manner.

"This is my younger sister. Don't you think we look alike?"

Two of the guests laughed, while another muttered something which Tao-ching could not hear. "What if that scoundrel Hu Meng-an should turn up here!" she thought with a start. She nodded to the guests with some constraint and took her things to the bathroom to have a bath and change before slipping away. She was hot and sticky after the journey and exhausted by the strain of the last few days. She had finished bathing and was in the bedroom smartening herself up, when Pai Li-ping hurried in, saying:

"Little Lin, let's go! I'm taking you out to enjoy yourself!"

"Thanks, but I'm sorry I can't go. I'm really pressed for time and must be off now."

"You can't let me down like this! I won't let you run away. Enjoy life while you can! Don't be so silly!" Pai Li-ping took Tao-ching's arm in a good-natured way, adding, "Don't you know that revolutionary work requires plenty of social experience too? If you're disgusted with the bourgeoisie, you should go and see how it really lives. Tonight there's a dance at the Peking Hotel. Let's go!"

"No, Li-ping, I can't. I don't dance, so don't insist." Tao-ching was frowning.

"What does it matter if you don't dance? You can watch the others. You see, my friends are waiting. One of them is the manager of the Yen Yeh Bank. The young woman is his wife. The two others are the chief secretary of the municipal government and the editor of a newspaper. They're influential people and they're waiting for you. Why not go and have a good time? What's the sense of always keeping to yourself?"

Unable to control herself any longer, Tao-ching flushed and her voice began to quiver with anger.

"What do you think you're up to, Pai Li-ping? I'm not going to be dictated to like this!"

Experience had taught Pai Li-ping tact. With no sign of having taken offence, she pressed her soft, pink cheek against Tao-ching's and whispered coaxingly:

"Don't be cross! It's because I like you so much that I can't go without you. Why don't we go, stay there for a little time, and come back early?" With that, she threw an arm around Tao-ching and walked her out of the room. Exasperated as she was, the girl did not like to make a scene before strangers, so she let herself be pushed into a shiny Ford.

Once in the ballroom of the Peking Hotel, Pai Li-ping again introduced her four friends to Tao-ching. She went off to dance with Mr. Pan, the chief secretary of the municipal government. The bank manager took the floor with his wife, leaving Tao-ching and the editor at the tea-table.

Superb blue palace-lanterns with fine silky tassels were suspended from the high ceiling of the magnificent hall. With the polished floor and long blue velvet curtains, they gave the hall a dreamlike quality. The jazz band struck up, and richly dressed, heavily bejewelled women were gliding along in their partners' arms under the soft lights. Sentimental songs, syncopated music and perfume filled the air. Though Tao-ching came from a landlord family, she had never before seen such a display. She stared at the women's gaudy, many-coloured high-heeled shoes and their fantastically enamelled toe-nails. She could hardly repress her disgust, and all of a sudden she seemed to see Wang Lao-tseng and his starving grandchildren.

"Miss Lin, have some lemonade!" She was recalled to the present scene by the voice of the editor, Ling Ju-tsai, who was seated beside her.

"No, thank you. I don't care for any just now." Tao-ching turned to watch the dancing.

"Please don't stand on ceremony, Miss Lin. . . . Dancing is a dull business, I've never learned to enjoy it. . . . What would you like to drink? I am very happy to have made your acquaintance and to have this chance to talk with you."

Forced to turn and face him, Tao-ching saw that he was a handsome, fair-complexioned man about thirty years of age. His Western-style suit was well cut, and he was wearing a rose-coloured tie. He had assumed a rather diffident manner. Not giving her a chance to answer, he continued, putting on an air and lowering his voice:

"Miss Pai and I are old friends. She tells me that you're a progressive. Yes, the country is certainly going to the dogs, but what can we do? As things are, it is such a struggle to make a living that we who live by the pen can find no way out. . . ."

Tao-ching scarcely heard him, she was engrossed in thoughts of Little Tiger and Cheng Teh-fu's family. "Two utterly different worlds!" she reflected.

The music stopped. Her cheeks still flushed from the dance, Pai Li-ping hurried back and laughingly said:

"I see you two are having a pleasant chat." Turning to Tao-ching, she added, "Mr. Ling is a man of feeling. He has just lost his wife and needs comforting. . . . Well, I'll not disturb you any more. Have a good talk!" With an arch smile at Ling Ju-tsai, she hurried off again.

Then Tao-ching began to understand why Pai Li-ping, who had chosen such a different path from hers, had been so warm and shown such concern. She was trying to present Tao-ching to Ling to please him! In a flash, all the kindly feeling she had for Pai Li-ping vanished. At first she was filled with regret, then she became indignant and depressed. As she watched her old friend make up to the banker, flirt with the secretary, and turn now and then to cast arch looks at Ling Ju-tsai and herself, she wondered, "Can this be the girl who shed tears with Tsui Hsiu-yu over the fate of their home in the Northeast! . . ." As the voluptuous music sounded, she vividly recalled the refugee students who had gathered in Pai Li-ping's room on New Year's eve two years previously.

As Pai Li-ping and her friends were dancing, with sickly pale hands Ling Ju-tsai obsequiously offered her a glass of coca-cola. But ignoring it she pushed back her chair and said:

"Please excuse me. I must go out for a few moments."

Chapter 16

When Tao-ching left the Peking Hotel, stars were sparkling in the pearl-grey sky and a cool, refreshing breeze was blowing. The world suddenly seemed larger, and her mind became clearer. Drinking in the fresh, invigorating air, she looked up at the bright twinkling stars and thought, "It's very late, almost two. Where shall I go?"

In order to throw possible pursuers off the scent, she turned quickly into a lane off Hsiakungfu Street and sped northward like an escaped prisoner for a while, then she slowed down to consider her next move.

"Where can I go at this hour of the night?" Unconsciously she had turned her steps towards Peihoyen Street near the

Peking University, where she had lived for several years surrounded by such good friends, where. . . . She suddenly recalled Wang Hsiao-yen, whose tender, kindly eyes held such attraction for her. "Yes, I'll go to her, whether she hates me or not, but she's not likely to hate me just because of her aunt. I must go and see her!" This decision made, she quickened her pace, pleasurable anticipation banishing the accumulated fatigue of the last few days.

She hurried through many familiar, deserted streets till she found herself, hardly knowing how, in front of the hostel where she and Yu Yung-tse had lodged. There she stopped in spite of herself. The black double gate was closed and she stared at it, her heart suddenly filled with regret mixed with revulsion. If it wasn't for him, she thought, Lu Chia-chuan might not have been arrested. . . . Hot tears came to her eyes. She hurriedly turned her head and left this small doorway.

It was after two in the morning when she reached the girls' hostel of the Peking University. She banged on the knocker of the gate and pressed the bell, and waited breathlessly in the empty street. She rang the bell many times before an old man asked slowly through the slit of the gate, "What do you want so late at night?"

"I want to see Wang Hsiao-yen! Will you please open the gate?" Her voice was hoarse from exhaustion and she longed to be admitted at once, to fall straight into bed, Hsiao-yen's bed or anybody else's, for a good sleep! But the old gate-keeper answered as slowly as before, "Visitors aren't allowed now. I can't open the gate till half past five in the morning. That's the rule. Come back after daybreak."

"But I've urgent business with her. Please let me in!"

"Can't be done, miss. Rules are rules." He shuffled away and shut the door with a bang.

"I can't stand here till morning!" Tao-ching leaned wearily against the shabby red wooden gate and looked up at the peaceful night sky. "Shall I go to a hotel? No. To find Hsu Hui? That won't do either. It will soon be day, I'd better walk around for a while and come back when it's light." Dragging

her feet, she slowly headed westwards. She had been without rest or sleep for the last two days; and now that the bitter struggle was over and it was possible to relax, this aimless, solitary walk in the still summer night made her feel even more drowsy and weary. She wandered along the well-known streets to the moat around the old Imperial Palace, then leaned against the parapet gazing idly down at the water glimmering like fish scales. A deep feeling of loneliness crept over her.

She reproached herself bitterly for her weakness in allowing Pai Li-ping to drag her away to waste time with those social parasites. How could she have associated with such people and wasted time when she had a letter for Hsu Hui in her pocket? Perhaps it was not very important, but it had been entrusted to her by a Party member. Looking at a tower on the wall of the Forbidden City, which loomed like some huge, crouching monster in the grey mist, she had a sudden vision of pale hands reaching towards her, and spat in disgust at the thought of Ling Ju-tsai. Brushing back her hair, she murmured, "You leave me alone, confound you!" Then she leaned her head against the parapet and dozed off from sheer exhaustion.

When she awoke the eastern horizon was pale with the light of a new day. She sighed with relief, and ran back happily, reaching the girls' hostel just as the clock struck four. The sky was a vast expanse of grey. Afraid to knock again, she sat down on the door-step to rest and was nodding off to sleep once more when a cry, faint as pattering raindrops, reached her ears:

"Mummy! Mummy! . . ."

She was startled and thought that she had been dreaming, but rubbing her eyes she again heard the faint voice calling: "Mummy! I want my mummy! . . ." Soft whimpering followed.

Wide awake now, Tao-ching knew that this was no dream, for the weak voice came from close beside her. She sprang to her feet to investigate and presently found two children huddled together on the cold stone porch of a shop on the opposite side of the road. When she bent down to look more closely, the dawning light revealed two boys, the elder one about eight years old, the younger five or six. Their dirt-streaked faces were emaciated and they were completely naked. Both seemed to be asleep, but the smaller one kept crying for his mother, his little mouth slightly open, tears hanging on his eyelashes.

Tao-ching's drowsiness promptly vanished. Where did these children come from and where was their mother? Though it was summer, the nights were still chilly and she was shivering in spite of her clothes; yet the two poor waifs were lying unclothed on the cold stone steps. Moved by compassion, she leaned forward to touch their faces and backs and found to her horror that the younger of the two was burning with a high fever! She was tempted to wake them and question them; but it would have served no purpose. Her thoughts wandered back to the Peking Hotel, from which she had just fled: the magnificent building with its regal splendour and blue velvet curtains, the bejewelled ladies and immaculate gentlemen. . . . With a sorrowful shake of her head she produced five yuan — all the money she possessed — and gently slipped two of them beneath the boys' heads before hurrying back to knock at the gate of the hostel.

Hsiao-yen was roused from sleep and opened her eyes to see Tao-ching beside her bed. She sat up languidly and said, "So it's you! . . . Well, do sit down."

Tao-ching was chilled by this cold yet polite reception. She had been prepared for a little show of temper but not for this kind of behaviour. She stood stock-still, gazing at her friend, and after an embarrassing silence said, "Hsiao-yen, are you angry on account of your aunt? . . . I was too inexperienced. I really didn't mean to. . . ."

"I don't know what you meant, Lin Tao-ching," interrupted Hsiao-yen, yawning and stretching as she switched on the light and put on her spectacles. "Surely you know the saying: Don't beat a dog if you want to be friends with its master."

Perched on a stool by the bed she looked out of the window while Tao-ching sat at a table nearby. Both girls were silent.

"Hsiao-yen, you're generous, you must understand that it wasn't a personal attack. . . ." After another silence Tao-ching proceeded, "Your aunt was actually very good to me, but she does have a backward outlook. . . ."

"Don't say any more. My aunt's given me the full particulars." Hsiao-yen cut her short with a trembling voice and stood up, her thick, arched eyebrows knit in anger. "It's been a great shock to me. No wonder they say that people of your sort are quite ruthless and utterly unfeeling. Does a revolutionary have to turn his back on his family and friends?"

For two or three seconds Tao-ching looked steadily at Hsiao-yen's flushed face and round, hurt eyes. Then she stood up, trembling with weariness, and said sadly:

"Hsiao-yen, I'm sorry about this, but I can't explain clearly just now. . . . I'd better go. Goodbye!"

She went slowly to the door, her face pale, her eyes glistening with tears.

Hsiao-yen's heart beat fast as she stared after her. When her friend reached the end of the corridor, she jumped up and rushed out, with tears in her eyes, to catch her by the arm.

"Don't be angry, Tao-ching!" she gasped. "Do come back!"

Tao-ching stopped, turned round and could no longer keep back her tears when she saw Hsiao-yen's agitated face.

"There are things I just can't understand, Tao-ching. . . . Please forgive me! Come back and we'll talk them over properly."

Tao-ching followed her friend back into the room and threw herself down on the small iron bed, where she lay motionless and inert.

Hsiao-yen sat on the edge of the bed beside her, holding her hand like a sister. There was an affectionate smile on her face, though tears were trickling down her cheeks.

"How and when did you come back to Peiping? Where did you stay last night?" Stroking Tao-ching's forehead she observed with dismay her sunken eyes and deep exhaustion which made her almost unconscious of her surroundings. "What's the matter? Are you ill?"

Tao-ching, lying prostrate with closed eyes, shook her head and answered with a smile, "There's nothing wrong with me. It's only that I haven't slept properly for a couple of days. Can I have a good sleep on your bed?"

"Of course. We'll talk after you wake up." Hsiao-yen was slipping out to wash her face when Tao-ching called anxiously, "Oh, wait a minute! Tell me, is Hsu Hui at the university now? I want to see her."

"Hsu Hui? . . ." Hsiao-yen's round bright eyes rested on her shrewdly. "She said her mother was ill and went home suddenly without even taking the final examinations. But some other undergraduates told me a different story. She may have left to do revolutionary work."

Tao-ching sat up abruptly and jumped out of bed, all her fatigue forgotten.

"How am I to find her, then?"

Hsiao-yen pushed her back and asked in gentle surprise:

"What's the hurry? She'll be back."

Lying on the pillow, Tao-ching stared wide-eyed at Hsiao-yen and muttered as if in a dream:

"Yes, she'll be back . . . she will. I know I shall find them."

Her eyes closed and Hsiao-yen could see that she had fallen into a sleep of exhaustion. She was still muttering that she must find Hsu Hui. Surveying her friend, Hsiao-yen said to herself:

"She certainly has the courage of her convictions!"

Pai Li-ping did not get up or have breakfast till noon, after which she lolled on the sofa looking through a fashion magazine. When she raised her head, the sight of a bag in one corner of the room provoked her. Directing a coquettish glance at Mr. Pan, the secretary-general of the municipal government who was seated beside her, she exclaimed:

"Some people have never learned to be grateful! I introduced her to Ling Ju-tsai out of kindness, but she's so bewitched by Karl Marx, I suppose she thinks Mr. Ling beneath contempt. Look how she let me down by running away last night! If I ever see her again, I'll give her a piece of my mind!"

"I've no idea whom you're talking about," said the secretary-general casually, fingering the rim of his spectacles.

"That bitch who was here last night, of course! I knew her at the university and she wasn't bad then; besides, she's pretty. Now that Mr. Ling's wife has died, I thought I'd introduce her to him — you know quite well that we need his help in that deal. But she went and played such a dirty trick on me. . . ." She took a deep breath and threw her lover an arch smile. "It takes all sorts to make a world! Some people pay lip-service to revolution, but I find that many others work in real earnest, and are not afraid of hardships or even of losing their heads. I confess that's quite beyond me!"

Mr. Pan lit a cigarette and curled up at Li-ping's feet, blinking lazily at the pale green ceiling as he asked in the same casual manner:

"You say your friend is a revolutionary? How do you know? If she doesn't like Ju-tsai, I don't blame her for running out on him!"

Li-ping sprang to her feet and, pointing a lacquered fingernail at the tip of her nose, protested vehemently:

"You think I've had no experience? I understand her all right! I'll stake my eyes she's refused my offers of friendship because she's bewitched by the Communist Party! . . ." She was interrupted by the entrance of an attendant, who made a slight bow.

"Madame, there's a girl student outside who has come to fetch something. She has a letter for you."

"Give it me!" ordered Li-ping with an impatient toss of her head, thinking it must be Tao-ching come for her bag.

The letter was handed to her. She opened it languidly and threw herself down on the sofa to read:

> Dear Li-ping,
>
> You must be angry with me. But I'm afraid I couldn't stand the role you cast me for, so I ran away. Are you really attracted by that luxurious, decadent life? To my mind, such a way of living can only weaken your will and make

> you degenerate. Li-ping, you once had a progressive outlook and helped me with your advice. Why should you keep such bad company and take such a dangerous path? Surely you ought to live a more meaningful life. . . .

"What nonsense!" Without troubling to finish the letter, she tore the thin paper into shreds. "She's learned some proletarian cant and thinks she's wonderful! To hell with her! We can all shout empty slogans, can't we?"

"Excuse me, madame, but the girl is waiting for her things." The attendant, as if rooted to the carpet, had seen Li-ping's treatment of the letter and heard her angry outburst. His reminder simply added fuel to the fire. Annoyed to have had a witness to her fit of temper, she shook a finger at Tao-ching's bag and raged:

"What are you waiting for, you fool? Take that filthy thing out of here!"

The attendant was well acquainted with the uncertain tempers of wealthy clients. When unsuccessful in their scramble for position and gain, or when disappointed in love, they would pound the table with their fists and abuse the staff. But when fortune smiled and they were happy, you had only to bow obsequiously, help the ladies with their wraps or present them with flowers, and you could be sure of a handsome tip of eight or ten yuan. Unwilling to jeopardize his job, he picked up Tao-ching's bag and withdrew in silence. He handed the bag with a smile to Hsiao-yen, who was waiting outside, and said:

"Have you come from the young lady who was here last night? I was wondering why Madame Pai, with all her rich connections, should suddenly get hold of a student and ask her to stay here. . . . Don't tell your friend, but Madame Pai flew into a nasty temper when she got that letter. . . . Well, birds of a feather flock together. Better steer clear of that crew — it's no use making up to the rich. . . ."

Hsiao-yen cut short the man's loquacity by saying:

"That's all right. They're through with each other now. Goodbye!" She put the bag in the ricksha and took her seat, pleased and annoyed at the same time.

Meanwhile Secretary-General Pan said to Li-ping with a smile, "Darling, I must make a phone call." He went to a dim alcove in the corridor where there was a telephone, dialled a number and said hurriedly in a low voice, "Is that Old Hu? Hurry up, or you'll be too late. A girl student from Peking University has just left Li Tung Hotel. Get after her, quick! Send someone to trail her at once. . . . No, not this girl, but she can lead you to another, Lin Tao-ching. . . . Yes! . . . What's that?" Mr. Pan put his head on one side and arched his eyebrows. "Don't tell me you've been looking for her! . . . All this time? What luck, old chap! You must stand me a treat for this. . . . Pai Li-ping? Don't talk nonsense! I'm just having a bit of fun with her. She's not bad; she knows how to be charming. . . . Come around for a couple of glasses of champagne when you've time. Well, that's settled then. So long!"

He replaced the receiver, yawned and stretched lazily, then straightened his blue silk dressing-gown before returning to his temporary home — Li-ping's room. Not finding her there, he lit a cigarette, extracted a small phial of heroin from his brief-case, inserted some carefully into the cigarette and smoked avidly. Then lowering his puffy eyelids, with a satisfied nod, he crowed:

"I'm in luck at last. . . . Everything's going my way!"

Chapter 17

Tao-ching took lodgings in a small hostel in Chunglao Hutung near Peking University, in order to wait for Hsu Hui and discover the whereabouts of Chiang Hua. She felt unable to live without comrades like these, and was now confident that she would find them sooner or later. During the day she read or studied on her own, seldom venturing to cross the threshold; but when night fell she often went for a walk with Hsiao-yen, who lived near by. In everyday life, Hsiao-yen was the more cautious of the two and before they went out she would always anxiously say:

"You must keep a good lookout for that Kuomintang rascal!" By this she meant Hu Meng-an.

"Don't worry. It's too dark for anybody to recognize me." Tao-ching brushed aside her warnings with a smile.

The road from Shatan to the Imperial Palace was lined on both sides with luxuriant locust trees, whose blossoms gave forth a refreshing, intoxicating perfume at night. The two girls would often stroll quietly past these trees to the parapet of the moat around the Forbidden City. Sometimes they would gaze at the majestic palace in the silvery moonlight, the rich oriental colours of the lofty roofs with their yellow glazed tiles and the imposing towers like colossal images of old gods rising proudly yet mysteriously into the night sky above the moat. In their silent appreciation of this scene they were invariably deeply impressed by thoughts of China's ancient civilization and her great artistic heritage. Lost in reflection, they often remained silent for a long while.

Sometimes in moments such as these, they would be carried away by enthusiasm, and talk earnestly about the past and the present. Tao-ching often spoke about the revolution and the class struggle, but Hsiao-yen, walking beside her, found every possible excuse to close this subject.

"How backward and obstinate you are!" Tao-ching would exclaim in reproach, after failing to persuade her friend to walk the same road and adopt the same outlook as her own. As for Hsiao-yen, although she loved Tao-ching and valued their friendship so much that she had even forgiven the injury to her aunt, she refused to be influenced by her friend's beliefs and views. She expected Tao-ching to respect her views in the same way. This being so, she found these lectures unpalatable and irritating.

Once when they were chatting by the moat, Tao-ching spoke of Chiang Hua.

"You know, Hsiao-yen, Chiang Hua, whom I came to know in Tinghsien, is really a typical revolutionary. He explained Russia's October Revolution to me, the Chinese communist movement, and the Nanchang Uprising on August 1st, 1927. Then he talked about Comrade Mao Tsetung who led the Hunan peasant movement and the Autumn Harvest Uprising, the joining of forces of the Red Army at the Chingkang Mountains, the creation by the Party of revolutionary base areas and the armed struggles in Kiangsi and other places and also of the mass movements led by the Party in the White areas. . . . He told me, too, that the chief problem of China's revolution is the land problem. . . . Now then, you needn't keep your nose in the air! Didn't you hear what I said?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. First it's the Soviet Union, then it's soviet government. They're both so remote — they've nothing to do with us!" Hsiao-yen slowly came to a halt and gently pulled Tao-ching over until they were leaning over the low wall surrounding the moat of the Imperial Palace. She smiled amiably as she smoothed back a strand of Tao-ching's hair that had been ruffled by the wind. "Why not talk about more practical things? Have you seen Yu Yung-tse since you left him?"

"Why speak of him?" asked Tao-ching with a wry smile, as she flung a pebble into the moat. "I bumped into the fellow yesterday in the street and was really furious. I was walking along the pavement in front of the Drum Tower when up came a man wearing a long gown and hat. Clinging to his arm was a girl with permed hair, heavily made up. When they got closer, there was no doubt but that it was Yu Yung-tse. I planned not to take any notice of him. But he stopped, nodded and called out: 'Why, isn't it Miss Lin?' I had no choice then except to nod in return. At that he had the nerve to sneer: 'Miss Lin, are you back because you've succeeded in making the revolution?'. . . Then he turned to pull that girl forward and maliciously introduced her to me: 'This is my wife Li Meng-lan. . . . This is no other than Mr. Marx's most famous disciple, Miss Lin. . . .' I cut in, 'Shut up, Yu Yung-tse! I never thought you could be so shameless and spiteful! . . .' I turned away then and left. What is there to say to a person like that?"

Hsiao-yen waited until she had finished, then shook her head gravely. "I hear he's now working at the Peking Library. He has probably got some good post there. He has rented a small house too. I often see him walking smugly along, but I always cut him. He's too self-centred."

"Yes, he's a self-satisfied climber," interposed Tao-ching. "He must have wormed his way into Hu Shih's favour and got a good job through him. After seeing Pu Yi, Hu Shih boasted, 'He called me sir and I called him Your Majesty.' If Yu Yung-tse had seen Pu Yi, he'd boast of saying 'Long live His Imperial Majesty!' . . . Pah, he's the slave of a slave!" Tao-ching's laugh rang out again. With her soft black hair blowing in the breeze, she looked like a mischievous boy.

"Well, enough of that," said Hsiao-yen. "Soon you'll be talking about the class struggle again, and I'd rather you didn't. You've visited so many places, why not tell me something about the interesting things you've seen?"

"Something interesting? I don't know where to start." Nonetheless, Tao-ching began to talk about her childhood and about the time when she had gone with her stepmother to Kupeikou to collect rents. Though years had since passed, some of those early experiences were indelibly engraved upon her memory. Her father and stepmother had often had tenants who could not pay their rent hung from the rafters and flogged. They had driven Widow Sun to jump into the river, and her own mother's father had drowned himself in the Paiho. . . . "No more of that." Tao-ching's voice had sunk and grown stern as she brooded over the past. "Let me tell you about my childhood friend, Hei-ni. You know, I shall never forget that poor friend of mine. . . ."

She embarked upon the story of Hei-ni, describing their attachment to each other, Hei-ni's intelligence and skill, and the kindness of Cheng Teh-fu and Hei-ni's mother though they lived from hand to mouth and often did not know where their next meal would come from. . . . At first she spoke in subdued tones with her eyes watching the glimmering water in the moat; but soon she gave way to her feelings and raised her voice, gazing at Hsiao-yen intently. The latter had listened with quiet composure at first, leaning against the parapet with her usual serious, rather studious air. When it came to that part of the story where Cheng Teh-fu carried Hei-ni up the hill, Hsiao-yen abruptly turned to wipe away her tears.

"I've never heard such a heart-rending story!" When she turned her head again, her eyes were red.

Tao-ching's heart was burning with pain. Inevitably, her thoughts had flown to her own ill-fated mother and to Hei-ni's mother, driven to suicide by Lin Po-tang. Cheng Teh-fu and Wang Lao-tseng and his grandchildren — all these downtrodden peasants appeared before her eyes.

"But there's another story, far sadder, which I haven't told anyone yet," she confided with a heavy heart. "My own mother's story."

She described the fate of Hsiu-ni and of Hei-ni's mother, saying in conclusion, "Hsiao-yen, it's true I was brought up in the exploiting class, but as soon as I learned how my own mother and I had been abused and ground down by a feudal landlord and the reason for this, when I saw with my own eyes the sorrow and despair on Cheng Teh-fu's face, I began to hate not only my so-called parents — Lin Po-tang and Hsu Feng-ying — but all exploiting classes. I've seen for myself the crimes, the baseness and ugliness of these classes. Now whenever I meet someone from the ruling class, I remember my own mother and Hei-ni." She stopped for breath, gripped her friend's hand tightly, then went on in a tremulous voice, "Hsiao-yen, do open your eyes to what's going on around us! When you see what misery there is in the world and what a grave crisis our country is facing, how can you just look on with folded hands?"

Hsiao-yen slowly raised her head to look hard at Tao-ching. In the shadows of night, her friend's great black eyes were like balls of fire, with a flame in them that seemed to burn the beholder.

Hsiao-yen said slowly and softly:

"Yes, Tao-ching, you're right! You've brought home to me today, for the first time, the existence of a different world from ours." In her low voice shame, distress and yearning mingled. After a pause she continued, "Will you recommend some books for me to read? What should I read first? There are all those books of yours in my room, yet — strange to say — I haven't bothered to open any of them!"

This was beyond Tao-ching's wildest expectations. She had often tried to convince her friend with revolutionary theories, to raise the level of her political understanding, but self-confident, conservative Hsiao-yen had always turned a deaf ear. This chance mention of Hei-ni and her own unhappy mother, however, had changed Hsiao-yen, making her willing to walk the same road as her friend. Tao-ching's clouded face lit up with happiness as she answered cheerfully and ingenuously:

"You can begin with *How to Study the New Social Sciences*. That's the first book I read and it's still in your room. After that try some works by comrade Mao Tsetung, Lenin's *The State and Revolution* and *"Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, and then the *Outline of Political Economy*. There are plenty of books. I know the more you read the more you'll want to read!"

"Good. With your help I'm sure I can make good progress."

"Well, it's not as easy as all that, Hsiao-yen. We've a long way to go from theoretical study to stepping on to the road of revolution — to becoming real revolutionaries. Take my case. . . ."

"My goodness, you've already become my teacher!" cut in Hsiao-yen with a laugh. "I haven't yet crossed the threshold of the school, and you've already begun lecturing!" Tao-ching laughed too. During the whole course of their long friendship they had never before been so completely in sympathy.

On their way back, Tao-ching pointed to a young man hurrying past under the street lamps, and whispered to her friend:

"Look, Hsiao-yen! Do you think he's a Communist?"

Hsiao-yen cast a glance at the young man and laughed softly.

"I think you're bewitched. What grounds do you have for saying he's a Communist?"

"You can tell he's honest, firm and serious. . . . I believe Communists may differ in appearance and temperament, but they have many common characteristics. The young man who just passed looked much more serious than ordinary people."

Hsiao-yen broke into merry peals of laughter. "Since when have you become a physiognomist?"

"It's true! I'm not joking!" protested Tao-ching gravely, puckering her brows again. "These days I've lost contact with all my revolutionary comrades and can't find any of them. I'm so anxious to find them that even my dreams are haunted by them. Whenever I pass someone in the street, I wonder if he is a Party member. . . . What ought I to do, Hsiao-yen? Living is a problem, too."

"Don't worry about that. Try to find a job. You can count on my help until you get one. What I can't undestand about the revolution is why sometimes you're in contact while at others you lose contact. . . ." She lowered her voice and looked cautiously round. "Are you a Communist?"

"No." Tao-ching's reply was even lower, not because she was afraid, but because the question pained her. "If I were, I think I'd be the happiest person in the world. But . . . but I'm not. . . ."

"You will be!" Hsiao-yen turned to look into her anxious face. "Yes, you will be some day! I'm sure of it."

As they approached Tao-ching's hostel, she saw a man in a felt hat standing at the entrance, looking steadily in the direction from which they were coming. Startled, she remembered the note Chiang Hua had entrusted to her, which she had not burned but was carrying with her, confident that some day she would find Hsu Hui. Now that something seemed to have gone wrong, she snatched the flimsy envelope from her pocket, rolled it into a ball and thrust it into her mouth, ready to swallow it if need be.

"What are you doing?" asked Hsiao-yen in surprise.

Tao-ching's only reply was a warning nudge.

When the two girls reached the hostel, several armed gendarmes emerged. A middle-aged man, apparently the officer in charge, looked Tao-ching up and down for a moment with knitted brows before asking in a husky voice:

"Are you Lin Tao-ching? Come along, then!"

With a gulp, Tao-ching swallowed the note. Then she turned to Hsiao-yen calmly and said, nodding:

"Go back to the university and work hard! So long!" She faced the officer and asked scornfully:

"Shall we go?"

"Get moving!"

A black car drew up before them and four or five gendarmes hustled her towards it.

As the engine started up, she could not help looking back at the pavement where Hsiao-yen was standing stupefied, the dim light of a street lamp accentuating the pallor of her face.

"What's there to stare at, damn you! Get in!" She was roughly pushed into the car and the door was slammed.

"Tao-ching! Tao-ching!" The car moved off, to be followed by the distressed and seemingly distant cries of Hsiao-yen, who was running after it.

Tao-ching kept calm, and sat back, composed and unafraid, as if she had long been waiting for this to happen.

Chapter 18

Earlier that evening clouds had sailed high in the pale blue sky above the beautiful, imposing tower of the Forbidden City. The dark grey water of the moat had glimmered like fish scales as the two girls had exchanged confidences and shed warm tears beside the low stone parapet skirting the moat....

"Today you've brought home to me, for the first time, the existence of a different world from ours."

The events of the evening now seemed remote and dreamlike. Only a few moments had passed since she and Hsiao-yen were talking freely, looking forward to an infinitely splendid future and discussing how to study politics and forge ahead. Yet when Tao-ching opened her weary eyes, she found herself in a clammy, pitch-black dungeon. Now utterly cut off from the world of men, she shuddered as her dreams of the future vanished, leaving her to face the grim reality of the present. Soon, no doubt, the Kuomintang butchers would drag her to the inquisition chamber, to torture and death — yes! Once more the idea of death rose unbidden to her mind.

As she crouched alone on the damp floor of the dark cell, she recalled the verse Chiu Chin* had written before bravely meeting her end: "The autumn wind and the autumn rain sadden my heart!" She thought of Lu Chia-chuan with his ardent, radiant smile, and of Chiang Hua and Hsu Hui. The recollection of her hero, Lu Chia-chuan, made her close her eyes and murmur with a smile, "Comrade, I think your fate will soon be mine!" For she was almost certain that he had already laid down his life for the cause.

Death! She had dreamed since girlhood of dying a heroic death. Now the time was approaching.

She lost herself in a medley of sweet reminiscences. Since death might come at any hour, she would spend her last moments brooding over the joys, sorrows and memorable events of her short life. Gone were the terror and loneliness of her first arrest, enabling her to reflect more calmly on the splendour of the struggle she might have to leave.

"Come on out!" The door was unlocked and swung open, a flashlight shone in, and a large hand seized her and dragged her out of the blackness.

A pale, middle-aged man in Western clothes was seated behind a desk in a small room. Two armed guards were in a corner, and a clerk was bent over a table ready to take notes.

Tao-ching stood erect in front of the desk, her face slightly averted.

"Are you Lin Tao-ching? How old are you?" The man in the Western clothes spoke slowly and huskily, as if only half awake.

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* 1875-1907. A woman revolutionary who was executed for her leading part in the struggle against the rulers of the Ching Dynasty.

There was a long pause, Tao-ching standing mute and motionless, her head turned away.

"Why don't you speak? We are asking you some questions. Don't you know you are a criminal?" The sleepy voice sharpened as the speaker lost patience.

"I'm no criminal!" she retorted without moving. "It's you who are the criminals!"

Thump! He pounded the desk and glared at her, bellowing, "None of your impudence, you vicious slut! We know beyond doubt that you're a Communist. Out with it! When did you join the Communist Party? Who is your leader? To which Party branch do you belong? If you tell the truth and repent, I'll let you off lightly."

Tao-ching turned slowly, chin up, to look straight at the man's thin, contorted lips. His pallid, lantern-jawed face, the wolfish gleam in his eyes and his dry, blackish lips reminded her in a strange way of her cruel persecutor Hu Meng-an. Just as all Communists seemed to share certain fine qualities, all secret-service men and fascists had the same repulsive characteristics.

"I only wish I were a Communist! Unfortunately I'm not up to standard." Tao-ching's voice was low, yet each word was clear and distinct.

"What's the use of quibbling? We arrested you on good evidence. You are not only a Communist, but have done much important work. Out with the truth!"

Her inquisitor pounded the desk again as if to make up for the lack of impressiveness in his drink-sodden, dissolute appearance.

"I've just told you." Tao-ching once more turned away and looked at her own shadow on the grey wall. "I want to join the Communist Party, but so far I've not been admitted."

This provoked more pounding on the table. The exasperated "judge" tore his hair and jumped to his feet.

"You bitch! What obstinacy and slyness! If you don't tell the truth, you'll be shot! Do you know that?"

"Yes, I know, and I'm ready." Her voice dropped still lower, all her energy was drained away.

"Aha! . . ." Before the thin-lipped rake could say more, another lank individual in a Western suit came in from a side door. He waved his hand to Tao-ching by way of greeting, narrowed his eyes and with a cold laugh said:

"Well, Miss Lin, remember me?"

"You devil!" Tao-ching fell back a few steps, dismayed by the appearance of Hu Meng-an. Her weariness left her, her heart beat faster. She was filled with anger, loathing, and fear of his insult. An involuntary shudder passed through her.

"You didn't think we'd meet again, eh?" Hu Meng-an, standing face to face with Tao-ching, devoured her with predatory eyes, and bared his teeth in an insolent smile. His breath stank of brandy.

"As the saying goes, Monkey can't jump out of Buddha's hand. What have you been up to now, little Communist devil? Isn't it time for you to bow to our great Three People's Principles?"*

"Get away from me!" cried Tao-ching, as she pushed the gaunt drunkard away. "You reek of blood. Don't come near me!"

The lean man banged so long and hard on his desk that the tea-cup on it crashed to the floor. Hu Meng-an thought it unbecoming to flare up in the presence of the guards and his colleague from the municipal Kuomintang headquarters. Instead, with chest thrown out and head held high, he eyed Tao-ching in silence for several seconds, a cunning smile playing over his face, before saying:

"Miss Lin Tao-ching! How many heads, pray, have you got to lose? What good has the Communist Party ever done you that you remain so stubbornly loyal and refuse to repent? I want to save you — that has always been my wish — but this is the second time you have fallen into my hands. Unless. . . ." He hissed the threat from between clenched teeth, "Unless you repent — and — confess your crimes, you — will be sorry for it! Not even your Karl Marx's spirit will be able to save you!"

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* The principles advocated by Sun Yat-sen but never put into practice by the Kuomintang: the Principle of Nationalism, the Principle of the People's Rights and the Principle of the People's Livelihood.

The thin man behind the desk seized this chance to chime in:

"A full record of your activities, in Tinghsien and elsewhere, is in our hands. Quick now, make a clean breast of your Party connections. Tell us the name of one other Communist, and we'll set you free at once."

This sent another shudder through Tao-ching. "Tinghsien? How have they found out what I did at Tinghsien?" Burning with anger, without warning she slapped the lean cheek of Hu Meng-an, shouting, "Go ahead and shoot me! I'm ready!"

Smack! Smack! Smack! Hu's clumsy hand slapped her pale face. Rubbing his own cheek, he stormed, "How dare you! An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth — that's what you Reds always preach. I'll give you good measure! There, take her away!" Darting a fierce glance at the guards by the door, he added with a sweep of his arm, "Torture her — don't spare her!"

As if in some nightmare, Tao-ching found herself being dragged into a large bleak room. On the walls and floor were instruments of torture the like of which she had never seen before. A couple of tall, brawny bullies, dressed in black, watched her eagle-eyed, ready to prevent any attempt to break away. She stood there, worn out, limp in every limb, dimly aware that it was very late. This was the hour of the night when mothers slept sweetly with their babes in their arms and young lovers murmured softly to each other. But what of her? . . . She wondered whether Hsiao-yen was asleep yet. Where were all her fine revolutionary comrades — Lu Chia-chuan, Chiang Hua, Hsu Ning, Lo Ta-fang, Hsu Hui, Hsu Man-

tun and staunch Aunt Li? None of them, nor her dear pupils, knew of the terrible plight she was in.

She stood there silent, with eyes clossed. Mistaking her passivity for fear, the hulking torturers clanked their instruments and jeered roughly:

"It takes a real hero to stand our instruments or a dose of pepper!"

"But that's not the worst! We can make her flesh sizzle and ooze white beads of fat with our red-hot irons! If pork can be roasted brown, so can human flesh. . . ."

"You've said it. If this girl knows what's good for her, she'll confess while there's still time to escape being hurt. 'A true hero doesn't look for trouble.' "

Tao-ching just stood there with closed eyes, as silent as if she were asleep. What was there for her to say? Biting her lips, she was thinking:

"Steady, now! Grit your teeth and bear it like a Communist!"

"So you want to show fight?" Losing patience, the bullies began to put her to the torture. . . .

She stood the most cruel tortures with fortitude. Bars were pressed down across the backs of her knees, one kettleful after another of pepper water was poured into her nostrils. . . . She bit her lips till they bled. She fainted and came round, only to faint again, but not a word passed her lips. Only when a red-hot iron was applied to her thigh did she utter a shriek and completely lose consciousness.

Day was breaking. The faint, pale light of early dawn filtered through the high window of the chilly torture chamber. The two fleshy torturers mopped their perspiring faces as they looked at Tao-ching, prostrate and senseless on the ground, her face livid, her body clotted with dark blood.

"This girl has guts!" grunted one of them. "What is it about the Communist Party that makes ordinary men and women behave like this? For communism they're ready to give up their lives. And what's more precious than life, I'd like to know?"

The other gave a loud sneeze. After wiping the spatters of blood from the bench with his hand, he made a sudden cutting motion at his neck to suggest beheading and cried out gruffly:

"There's nothing else we can do! We have to obey Generalissimo Chiang's orders: Kill a thousand innocent people sooner than let one Communist escape. Yes, kill, kill, kill them all! Root them all out — the Red bastards!"

At the mention of the generalissimo he sprang to attention, aimed a vicious kick at Tao-ching, and burst into frenzied, uncontrollable laughter.

Chapter 19

Three days passed.

Tao-ching regained consciousness in fearful pain. As she slightly opened her eyes with a groan, a host of strange, blurred scenes crossed her bewildered mind.

"Am I still alive? . . ." she asked herself, and fainted away.

The next time she came to, she tried hard to recall what had happened. One look around and she realized that she had been arrested and tortured and was now in a prison cell.

Just then a soft, affectionate voice reached her ears.

"At last you've come to! I've been so worried!"

Tao-ching slowly turned her head towards the speaker. The faint light admitted by the iron bars of the dark, musty cell showed her a pale, slender woman lying on a bed of boards near by.

Mustering up all the strength left in her, she asked in a barely audible voice:

"Am I still alive? You. . . ."

The other woman, instead of answering her, turned towards the window and called:

"Wardress, wardress! Come here! The casualty in our cell has come to!" Then she turned back to Tao-ching and whispered encouragingly, "I want them to come and see to your injuries. We must do our best to keep alive."

Tao-ching's eyes were riveted upon that pallid face so expressive of warm feeling. She now saw that her companion was a beautiful woman in her late twenties. Her face was pale and yet as lustrous as marble, and her large, black eyes sparkled like jewels in that murky cell.

"Why, she's like a Greek goddess! . . ." This incongruous notion flashed across Tao-ching's mind. Too weak and in too much pain to move, with a supreme effort she whispered to her, "Thank you! But don't call a doctor. I'm done for. . . ."

Just then the wardress unlocked the door and came in, followed by a doctor with uncut hair, who looked like a prisoner. As he removed Tao-ching's torn and blood-stained clothes, excruciating pain made her faint once more.

When she recovered consciousness, her fellow prisoner was still watching her anxiously and tenderly from her cot, and the prison doctor was standing before her with a small case of medicine in his hand. He examined Tao-ching and said to the other woman:

"She shouldn't faint again. Don't worry. She has a sound constitution. . . ." Then he smiled at Tao-ching. "They asked me to dress your injuries, so I'll do what I can. There are no bones broken. You should be better soon."

Some hours later, when Tao-ching had taken a little rice gruel, life revived in her, although she was still racked by sharp, burning pain. She did not cry out, but bore it with fortitude. Her eyes kept straying to the other prisoner's fine-cut features, and she could not help wondering, "Who is she? A Communist?"

"Well, the worst is over now! A little more food will set you right, I'm sure." The young woman, whose name she learned was Cheng Chin, smiled at her. "When you feel better, you must tell me how you were arrested and what's going on outside. It's very dull here, not knowing what's happening. But I won't ask you to talk now. That would be too inconsiderate. We'll wait for two or three days until you're better."

Yu Shu-hsiu, a schoolgirl in the same cell, had also been tortured and Cheng Chin often spoke to her as well as to Tao-ching. She seemed to be ill, for she lay on her cold wooden cot unable to move, showing concern for them by words and looks. Her soft voice could often be heard.

"Please come here, wardress! They want some water to drink."

"Come here, wardress, please! Come here!"

"Wardress!" she would say as soon as Wardress Liu entered. "Won't you bring this girl something to eat after the terrible tortures she's been through?" If the food brought was only a mouldy corn bun and rancid soup with yellow vegetable leaves floating on the surface, she would protest with a frown, "How can she swallow that? Do fetch something better — we shan't forget you in future!"

Strange to say, the thin wardress seemed ready to oblige and rendered them many a service willingly, even at the risk of being discovered by the other gaolers and guards.

The schoolgirl, who was fifteen or sixteen, had a pretty, oval, intelligent-looking face. She was not too seriously injured to leave her bed and walk about. But all day she lay without a word, weeping with terror, and at night Tao-ching often heard her cry out in her sleep, "Mummy! Mummy! I'm so afraid! . . ."

She had never been parted from her mother before, and her cries would ring through the impenetrable darkness.

Cheng Chin, still awake, reached out to take the girl's hand in hers and murmur:

"Are you in any pain? . . . Nothing serious? . . . Then why cry? I suppose you're homesick, is that it? Well, don't give way any more, dear. It's no use!" She paused to take a deep breath and, when Shu-hsiu's sobs had stopped, went on to say, "When I was fifteen, they arrested me in Shanghai. I was terrified and wept day and night. But the more I cried, the more cruelly the reactionaries beat and bullied me; till I decided not to cry any more. I followed the example of the older women in my cell, who stood up to the die-hards and talked back. Those bullies only attack the weak. And what do you think? As soon as I showed I wasn't afraid of them, they stopped beating me. . . ." She broke into soft laughter, in which Tao-ching and Shu-hsiu joined.

"But Cheng Chin, dear," protested the schoolgirl in a voice that faltered. "I cry because of the unfairness of it all."

Cheng Chin though short of breath and feeling very weak did her best to comfort her.

"Shu-hsiu!" she said softly and tenderly. "Do you think you're the only one unfairly treated? Oh, no! There's no place for honest people under tyrants. In this society the wicked thrive, while decent folk are put on trial and persecuted. That's the practice today — the usual practice!"

Encouraged and made to see things in their true light, the girl calmed down and did not cry any more.

Tao-ching had taken an immediate liking to Cheng Chin and listened to her with delighted surprise.

It was only natural that the older woman, who had been there the longest, should know the way to get things done. What puzzled Tao-ching, however, was Wardress Liu's eagerness to oblige her. This made her wonder who Cheng Chin could be.

"What do you do, and why were you arrested?" asked Cheng Chin softly, the following night, after the guards had made their round of inspection.

"I don't know why I was arrested," replied Tao-ching in a feeble voice. "I'm a student who had to give up studying. I believe in communism and the Communist Party. . . . Maybe that's why they took me. I'm not a Party member, but I want to give my life for the Party and the cause of humanity. I believe that time's come, and all I'm thinking of now is how to prepare myself for the last moment."

Cheng Chin listened attentively and her face grew grave. Some time passed before she raised her head to look Tao-ching straight in the eyes by the light of the dim lamp.

"You mustn't think that being arrested is the end of everything, or that death is sure to follow. It's not! Wherever a Communist finds himself, even in prison, he should and can go on working for the revolution. We must work till the last moment, till our last breath. We want to live to see a communist China, to welcome that day with joy. . . ." She glanced from Tao-ching to Shu-hsiu and her black eyes flashed with happiness as she went on to describe the brilliant prospects of communism and China's bright future when she had become a free, independent and prosperous country on an equal footing with all other nations.

Tao-ching listened and looked in wonder, held spellbound by those great, beautiful eyes so bright with intelligence. Certain that Cheng Chin was a revolutionary, she was impressed by this sincere encouragement and criticism. As if she had flown to freedom, warmth and happiness flooded her heart. How fortunate she was to have such an ardent, steadfast revolutionary beside her! The comrade she had longed and searched for in vain had been provided for her by the enemy, and when she least expected it.

Three days later, after the evening meal and the first nightly inspection, Cheng Chin began chatting with the two girls again. She liked to talk on and on as if she could not stop until she had shared everything she knew with them.

"Let me tell you something about prison life, my dears. This happened four years ago in a prison in Soochow. . . ."

"By the way," put in Tao-ching, "where are we now? That's something I still don't know."

"This is part of the secret prison under the military police headquarters. The Third Regiment of Military Police and the Kuomintang municipal headquarters often quarrel with each other, but sometimes it suits them to co-operate." After answering Tao-ching, Cheng Chin went on, "When I was in the Soochow prison, I went through a three-year course on Marxism-Leninism and learned a great deal."

"How could you take a course like that in prison?" asked Shu-hsiu in astonishment.

"It was something of a miracle," replied Cheng Chin with an effort. Her eyes were closed and she was obviously very tired. "Every morning when the steam-whistle of a nearby factory blew, about two thousand political prisoners would get up — women as well as men — not to mention some serving sentences on other charges. After exercising, by marking time on the spot, we would sit on our beds to study. Some of us were sentenced to death, others to life imprisonment, others to fifteen, ten or eight years in gaol. But none was willing to waste time. We all flung ourselves conscientiously into our studies. Some learned English, others Russian, Japanese or German. Naturally, political theory was a course everyone took. I learned German and later even taught it."

"How odd! What was the use of learning a foreign language while under sentence of death?" asked Shu-hsiu, wide-eyed, half incredulously. Her morale was better since she had come to know the other two.

Cheng Chin raised her head. In the dim lamplight, her face showed clear and beautiful despite its pallor. Tao-ching was reminded of a marble statue and thought, "If only I could carve beauty like that!"

She was about to speak when Cheng Chin motioned her to be silent, as the tread of the guard's heavy boots sounded along the passage outside.

"So you think they were odd, Shu-hsiu?" went on the elder woman when the tramping had died away. "They weren't odd at all. They weren't ordinary people, you see, but Communists or believers in communism. Anyone who believes in communism and is willing to fight for the right and for the happiness of the overwhelming majority of mankind doesn't hesitate to give his life to the cause. His individual life then becomes as great as the lives of hundreds put together, or even as the whole of humanity. Don't you understand, dear, that is true immortality? I've seen many a Communist just before execution spending his last few minutes in prison cheerfully working to the last — because these are people who never die!"

Tao-ching listened avidly, not missing a word, feeling the blood coursing through her veins till she tingled with excitement. She had never thought to meet a staunch Bolshevik in such a place as this; a veteran revolutionary who reminded her of Lu Chia-chuan, Chiang Hua and the other heroes of whom she dreamed. Although ill and in pain after inhuman tortures, Cheng Chin remained cheerful and confident, eager to devote all her remaining strength to helping and guiding Tao-ching and Shu-hsiu.

"It's wrong to think of death before you've taken part in the struggle!" Tao-ching recalled Lu Chia-chuan's words of long ago. She had never really given up her naive longing for martyrdom, but now she realized that this was a symptom of an unhealthy weakness on the part of one who lacked the courage to fight to the last, and dreamed of dying a heroine. This was cowardly! . . . She turned to gaze at Cheng Chin, inexpressibly ashamed.

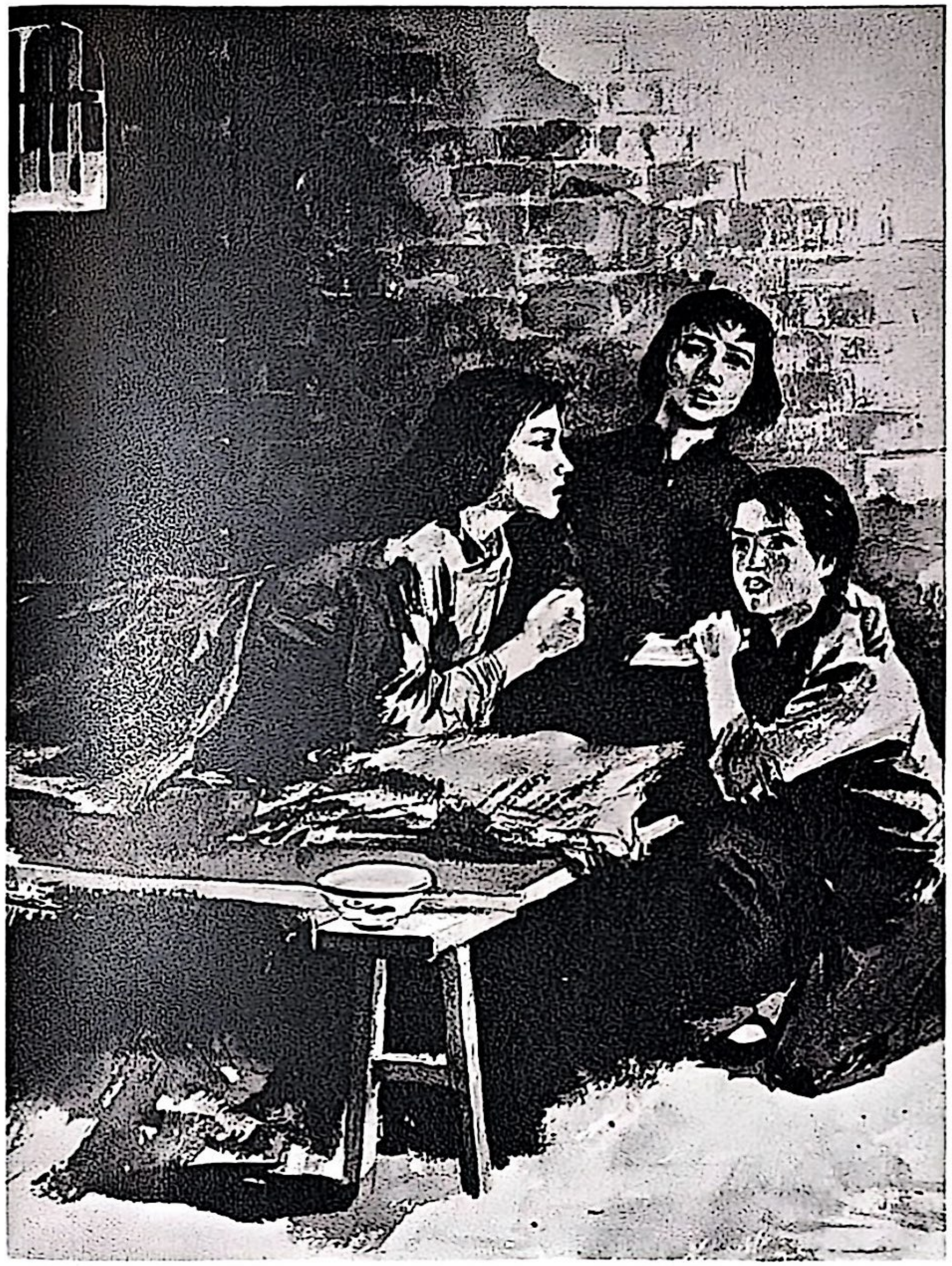
By now Shu-hsiu had nearly overcome her homesickness and tearful fear of hardships, and was growing quiet and composed. From time to time, after peeping through the door to make sure there was no guard outside, she would steal over to sit on the edge of Tao-ching's cot and listen, wide-eyed, to Cheng Chin's well-nigh legendary stories of struggles in prison.

On the fourth night Cheng Chin gave them another instalment.

"We even started a few papers and magazines in prison!" She smiled, her eyes closed again. "While I was there, we put out two or three publications in addition to a small news-sheet to exchange information. Some of us wrote articles, others did the editing and others the copying. I was one of the copyists. I couldn't work during the daytime, but at night the others in my cell would take it in turn to stand watch while a couple of quilts were held over me. Under this 'canopy', by the light of a small bean-oil lamp or a flashlight, lying flat on the floor, I would copy out the manuscripts in ink. . . ."

"There's too much talking in this cell!" warned sharp-faced Wardress Liu softly through the keyhole. "You'd better keep quiet. If the guards catch you, you'll be in plenty of trouble!"

"You're a good sort, always willing to help us. Let us talk



a little!" coaxed Cheng Chin. "You know what a hard time we prisoners have of it. We're all so homesick."

When the wardress said nothing, Cheng Chin told the two girls with a smile: "She comes from a poor family and is sympathetic to us. . . . But I can't go on with my story in any case. I'm worn out after those tortures and my heart's behaving badly tonight. . . ." She stopped, panting for breath, and presently seemed to doze off. The girls kept quiet in order not to disturb her. But after a short rest, Cheng Chin reached out to take Shu-hsiu's hand again. "I want to live just as much as you do, my dears," she said gently. "I've a father and mother, a brother and a sister, besides many good friends and comrades. . . . I love them all. How I wish I could fly out of this dingy prison to enjoy myself with them in the open air and bright sunshine!"

"Are you married?" asked Shu-hsiu naively. "Your husband must be a very handsome man."

"My husband?" Cheng Chin's face lit up. "Yes, you're right. He's tall and handsome, musical, a lover of the arts, and a writer of no mean ability. He was always overflowing with energy. We studied together in the Soviet Union. We were very much in love."

"Where is he now?" broke in Tao-ching. "If ever there's a chance, I'd love to meet him."

"Where is he now? Oh, far, far away. It's four years since I last saw him, but let's not talk about him now, dear. I want to tell you about another man whom I met in prison. Would you like that? I can't sleep just now, and the guards are slack in their rounds at this time of night. So I shall be glad to tell you, if you aren't too sleepy." She threw all her energy into her story, talking to her young fellow prisoners late into the night, stopping only to catch her breath or rest for a moment. The words tumbled over each other in her eagerness.

"Li Wei was a brilliant, able young man, willing to stand hardships and tireless in his studies. He joined the Communist Party before the great revolution of 1924-27. The Party sent him to the Soviet Union to study, and there he met the girl who became his wife — they were comrades. In 1928, the year after the failure of the great revolution, they came back together to China. He took up underground Party work in Shanghai while she became a mill-hand in a Shanghai cotton mill. The Party headquarters, where Li Wei lived, passed as a rich man's residence. It was rather amusing when his wife wanted to see him. She always wore a tunic and trousers in the mill, you see, but she had to put on a fashionable gown before she could visit that house. As she often had no time to go elsewhere to change, she used to carry the gown in a small parcel under her arm and change hastily in a deserted lane near the headquarters."

"Goodness! How embarrassing if someone happened to come by just then — especially if it was a man!" Shu-hsiu's astonishment and concern were comically touching.

"Oh, Shu-hsiu, don't interrupt!" protested Tao-ching. "I'm sure she loved her husband so much she'd do anything to see him." Then she urged Cheng Chin, "Do tell us what happened to them!"

Cheng Chin smiled.

"Don't be impatient, my dears! Let me see. . . . Yes, this is how it was.

"In 1930 they were arrested one after the other and sent to the Soochow prison. The enemy, knowing that he was a prominent Party member who must have many connections, gloated over the capture of Li Wei. They tried by all sorts of threats and bribes to wrest his secrets from him, but despite all their cunning, despite all their inhuman tortures, Li Wei stood firm. He knew that his wife was in the same prison, but in order not to implicate her he controlled his feelings and pretended not to recognize her. He not only put up a stubborn fight himself, but led his comrades' struggle in the prison. When the enemy learned of his activities they were mad with rage. They hit on a vile scheme and took him to Shanghai, where he was dressed in a smart Western suit, seated in a car, and

forced to accompany them when they went to arrest more Party members. They tried to pull him out of the car when they reached their destination, but he just lay back and refused to budge. They beat him savagely, but he didn't move. Instead, he shouted to the curious crowd that had gathered around, 'I'm a prisoner! They've dressed me in foreign clothes and seated me in a fine car, but my body is covered with painful wounds and I won't get out however hard they beat me. These Kuomintang agents are like wolves!'

"The frustrated secret-service men had to take him back to Soochow. On his return to the prison he told his comrades, 'The enemy won't let me live much longer. I shall soon have to leave you for ever.' The others were bitterly distressed, but he studied, worked and did his morning exercises as cheerfully as ever. He was very particular about personal cleanliness, and whenever he could get a little water he washed himself down. He was tall and handsome, with big eyes and jet-black hair. He had a persuasive tongue, and wherever he went he did propaganda work. Even some of the gaolers came under his spell. Sometimes he sang in a fine, clear tenor voice. His splendid character made those gaolers who still had some conscience left treat the prisoners less cruelly.

"At last the day he was to die arrived. When the guards came for him, he brushed the dust from his clothes and, as calm as usual, said to the men in his cell, 'Comrades, I must leave you now! Fight on — never give in! We know that communism will triumph in the end!' At the door of the cell he shook hands with them one by one, saying, 'I wish you all victory!' After that, with his head held high, he strode to the execution-ground. . . . Behind the bars his friends gazed after him in anguish, each feeling as if a knife were plunged into his own heart. Then the *Internationale* rang out clear and loud — how stirringly he sang! Then he shouted at the top of his voice, 'Long live the Chinese Communist Party!' The sound was drowned by a volley of shots. . . . At once all the prisoners, including the ordinary prisoners and, of course, his wife, burst out passionately with the *Internationale.* Many of them were in tears. . . ."

Cheng Chin's voice was husky. She was obviously speaking through tears herself.

"Oh, don't go on, sister! I understand!" Tao-ching wept as she stroked Cheng Chin's face in the dark and wiped away the tears streaming down her cheeks.

But Shu-hsiu's curiosity was aroused.

"Sister Cheng, what became of Li Wei's wife?" she asked. "Wasn't she broken-hearted when he died?"

"Do be quiet, Shu-hsiu! Don't you understand?" prompted Tao-ching gently, afraid to upset Cheng Chin further.

"What do you mean?" persisted Shu-hsiu. "I don't understand!"

After a long silence, Cheng Chin answered gravely in a barely audible voice:

"You still don't understand, dear? After all, Tao-ching is more experienced than you. . . . Li Wei was my husband! We parted four years ago."

The cell was plunged into a deep silence. The three prisoners seemed to have fallen asleep, but the stillness was suddenly broken by a storm of weeping — it was Shu-hsiu sobbing as violently as when Tao-ching was first thrown into the cell. This time, though, she was not crying for her mother.

"Dear Sister Cheng!" she faltered between her sobs. "I'm so grateful to you! You've taught me to know what life really is, what the truth means!"

Up rushed a guard with a rifle on his shoulder. He was one of the most savage of their gaolers, and he pounded the iron door with the butt of his gun, pouring out a stream of abuse:

"You bitches! Do you want to start a revolt? What do you mean by such a racket at this hour of the night? Do you want to die?"

As his harsh bellow died away, Tao-ching took Shu-hsiu's hand and said:

"Do you understand, Shu-hsiu? We're not imprisoned, we're taking a course in a Marxist-Leninist university!"

Chapter 20

Tao-ching could not sleep that night for pain. The festering burns on her legs had become inflamed, every bone in her body ached. She lay pondering over the story Cheng Chin had told them, and over her words of encouragement. Li Wei, a true Bolshevik, had fought stubbornly to the end. Though the enemy had not questioned her again, she realized that she must be prepared to fight them in court. She no longer thought of death. "We must struggle to live on, to live on until communism is realized in China." Cheng Chin's story was a powerful inspiration, one which both gladdened and grieved her.

"Aren't you asleep yet, Tao-ching?" It was well past midnight and moonlight was streaming through the small window of the cell. Cheng Chin could tell from Tao-ching's irregular breathing that she was still awake.

"I've been wondering what to say if the reactionaries question me again. Will you give me some advice, sister? I've so little experience."

"Is there any evidence against you in their hands? Have you any special connection with Party members? If you trust me, tell me the truth."

Tao-ching, with full confidence in this veteran revolutionary, answered frankly:

"No, I've no connections with Party members, and they've no evidence against me."

"That's good, Tao-ching. So long as I live I'll do all I can for you. They don't seem to be paying much attention to you and Shu-hsiu, so you may be released some day. For that reason you must insist that you're not a Party member but an ordinary girl without a job. If they torture you, just grit your teeth and hold out. . . . But I don't think they'll torture you again, considering how badly you were hurt last time. The thing is never to give in to the enemy — we must fight to the bitter end. You can be quite sure that the final victory will be ours. You're anxious to join the Party, aren't you? If you do as I say, you'll become a good Communist and a glorious, front rank fighter for the peace and happiness of mankind." Cheng Chin said all this without a pause, but now in her weakened condition a fit of coughing convulsed her so that she could not continue.

"Comrade Cheng!" said Tao-ching in a tremulous voice, taking that soft, thin hand in hers. "I shall never forget this night and your encouragement. I'm going to follow your example, I'm going to learn to be a Communist and fight to my last breath. Yes, I'm going to work with all my might for that glorious day when I shall become a Party member, and even if I die I want the Party to accept me posthumously. . . ."

"Dear comrade, I'm so glad!" Cheng Chin clasped her hands tightly in the dark. And Tao-ching, moved by her sincere and noble friendship, felt the tears coursing down her cheeks.

"Tao-ching, there's something that I ought to tell you. . . ." Cheng Chin paused before going on as calmly as ever, "Ever since my last interrogation, I've known that they won't be letting me live much longer. . . . They believe I was sent here by the Central Committee. So I'm prepared. . . ."

In a daze, Tao-ching felt her heart miss a beat. She gripped Cheng Chin's hand tightly and demanded anxiously, "What do you mean, sister?"

Shu-hsiu, who had woken and evidently heard Cheng Chin's last words, cried out in horror:

"Sister Cheng! What was that you were saying?"

"Why, nothing," was the guarded answer. "Tao-ching and I were just chatting because we couldn't sleep. By the way, Tao-ching, why do you have such a strange name? It's like a nun's."

"My father was a Buddhist who meant at one time to become a monk, but couldn't tear himself away from his concubine. . . ." Tao-ching stealthily wiped her tears. "That's why he gave me such a hateful name."*

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* Tao-ching, translated literally, means Holy Serenity.

Shu-hsiu chuckled and said:

"Oh, do let me tell you! I dreamed about my mother again." She murmured contentedly as if still dreaming, "I saw my small brothers too. When I got home from prison they crowded round so happily. . . ."

Cheng Chin turned to Tao-ching on her left to wipe away her tears, and then tucked in the quilt over Shu-hsiu on her right. This done, she said quietly:

"It's late now. Let's all try and get some sleep. I'm afraid there'll be trouble if the guard hears us talking."

The next morning guards came to take Cheng Chin out for trial. Still lying on the bed, she said, "Just a moment! Let me comb my hair first!"

When she had dressed her long silky hair carefully, they carried her away.

In a few minutes she was brought back again. She lay motionless for some time, too exhausted to speak. As soon as she had recovered a little, the two girls asked almost at once with deep concern:

"What did they say, sister? How is your case going?"

"Well, nothing much happened. They simply asked if I was better. If not, they said, they might send me somewhere else."

This answer, which satisfied Shu-hsiu, only intensified Tao-ching's anxiety. But she found it hard to put her fears into words.

Cheng Chin spent the whole morning teaching them a song which prisoners in Shanghai, Hangchow and Soochow had sung since 1930. She sang in a hushed voice:

Prisoners, prisoners of the times,
We have done no wrong!
We were snatched from the battle-field,
From the front of class struggle;
We are not prisoners but captives,
In whose veins hot blood still seethes
Despite cruel tortures.

Iron bars, chains, high prison walls,
Can rob us of our freedom,
Not of our revolutionary spirit!

Prisoners, prisoners of the times!
Many have died for the cause,
But the living fight on;
Rotten prison fare and vermin
May waste our flesh
But cannot wear out our courage!

Prisoners, prisoners of the times!
Failure is the mother of success,
The final victory will be ours!
We steel and temper ourselves
To fight bravely on!
The day will come
When red flags follow the sun
To all parts of the earth!

The song was a long one and Cheng Chin was too weak and tired to teach them more than the first and last stanzas. So the three of them spent a happy morning together.

That afternoon they slept from sheer exhaustion. Tao-ching, wakened by a gentle hand, heard Cheng Chin whisper:

"Comrade Lin Tao-ching, there is something I must tell you. I may not live till tomorrow. . . . Some day if you have the chance, please pass on this message for me to the Party. My real name is Lin Hung. I was transferred here from Shanghai last October. Unfortunately a renegade informed against me and I was arrested soon after I started my work. My conscience is clear, though. I haven't disgraced the Party, but have fought every inch of the way. . . . I hope the Party will enlarge our Red Army a hundredfold and strengthen her leadership of the resistance to Japan. I know the final victory will be ours. As for you, dear comrade, I want you to fight to the bitter end and strive to become a steadfast Bolshevik. . . ." In the dim cell Lin Hung's lovely eyes shone with such dazzling

brightness that she did not seem to be talking of her own death but of some certainty of happiness, of an inspiring, exhilarating future. Pausing for breath, she closed her eyes to rest for a moment, then gazed eagerly at Tao-ching as she asked, "Will you promise to pass on my message to the Party?"

Unable to speak for tears, Tao-ching nodded vigorously and reached out to grasp Lin Hung's white fingers. She looked hard and long at that lovely face that seemed carved in marble. . . . Her heart seemed to have stopped beating. She found it almost impossible to believe that anyone so vital could die.

Before going to sleep that night, Lin Hung took off a rose-coloured cardigan and gave it to Tao-ching.

"You're not very strong, Tao-ching. Please put this on." From beside her pillow she took an attractive plastic comb from Shanghai and said to Shu-hsiu with a smile, "Do you like this comb, dear? I want you to have it as a keepsake."

By this time Shu-hsiu, too, sensed that something was wrong and she and Tao-ching wept together. The night was dark and oppressive, as if a storm were brewing. The hours dragged painfully away.

Towards midnight the iron door opened. Lin Hung was lifted on to a wooden door. As she was being carried away, she held out both hands to her friends and, although unable to reach them, cried encouragingly, "Goodbye, my dears! Take good care of yourselves!"

Lin Hung had no sooner been carried out of the casualties cell than a storm of shouting resounded to the roof of the dark prison:

"Down with the Kuomintang reactionaries!"

"Long live the Chinese Communist Party!"

"Communism is invincible!"

"Comrades, avenge us!"

It was Lin Hung who had given the lead with these slogans, but she was joined by others, more and more, till hundreds of prisoners were shouting. Their fearless, impassioned cries re-echoed to the sky.

Lying on her cot, pressing the rose cardigan to her breast, Tao-ching joined in the slogans with all the strength left in her, although her feeble voice was barely audible.

Shu-hsiu did not join in the shouting. Like a child whose mother has been snatched away, she jumped from her cot to rush after Lin Hung as she was carried off.

"Sister Cheng! Sister Cheng! Don't leave us! . . . You mustn't die! You don't deserve to die!"

A ruthless hand banged her head against the wall, and a brutal kick in the stomach knocked her senseless. Her face was bathed with tears.

There was no sound of any shot that night. Ever since Chiang Hsiao-hsien, Commander of the Third Regiment of Military Police, had been sent as a police-dog by Chiang Kai-shek to Peiping, many Communists and young patriots had been arrested and shot each day. Many others were secretly murdered. That night, Lin Hung and ten other staunch revolutionaries were buried alive.

Tao-ching and Shu-hsiu, now alone in the bleak cell, groped through the dark to clasp hands and lock their wasted fingers together, nestling close to each other like a couple of motherless children.

"Tao-ching, there are just the two of us now. I've only you now, dear Tao-ching."

Hugging Tao-ching, Shu-hsiu broke down completely, weeping for Lin Hung and for her own failure to understand life before. Though only sixteen, she felt ashamed of her past ignorance.

"Shu-hsiu, dear, don't give way like that!" With tears in her own eyes, Tao-ching stroked the younger girl's hair as they lay in the dark. "Remember tonight! Don't ever forget tonight! Don't ever forget Sister Cheng's murder!"

After Lin Hung's death, the task of caring for Shu-hsiu fell naturally to Tao-ching, who taught her and watched over her with a motherly and comradely concern.

But Tao-ching's own health was failing.

All day long she lay, semi-conscious, on a damp, dirty cot. After Lin Hung died, anaemia, a poor diet and the festering of her burns nearly carried her off. Fortunately the wardress was compassionate enough to bring her noodles or egg soup from time to time and fetch the prison doctor to attend to her. With Shu-hsiu's warm, tender care, they finally succeeded in pulling her through.

Five days after Lin Hung's death, another sick prisoner was brought to their cell. She was a sallow complexioned, plump, round-faced woman of about thirty, with flabby muscles and a strident voice. She had no sooner lain down than she spoke in a friendly tone to Shu-hsiu, who was watching her curiously.

"You can't be out of your teens yet, dearie. Fancy locking up a child like you! . . ."

Opening her eyes a fraction, Tao-ching saw Shu-hsiu respond eagerly:

"I'm sixteen. Why are you here, elder sister?"

"Because of revolutionary work. And you? Are you a Communist?" She turned to address the same question to Tao-ching in the same friendly tone.

Tao-ching had some misgivings, for this woman did not look like a revolutionary. Yet no ordinary criminal would have been sent here. She shook her head languidly without replying, but Shu-hsiu was quick to answer for her:

"Tao-ching here has been cruelly tortured. A few days ago we had a very fine person here — Cheng Chin — but they put her to death. Tao-ching was so upset that she's grown even weaker. . . ."

In her innocence, the girl would have said more, but Tao-ching coughed and murmured, "Shu-hsiu, will you get me some water, please?"

The girl broke off and jumped down from her cot to pour water from a chipped enamel mug. As Tao-ching bent over the cup, she squeezed her friend's fingers and gave her a warning glance. Shu-hsiu blushed and nodded understandingly.

The newcomer continued to question Shu-hsiu, because she was young and artless.

"This cell isn't bad, dearie. It's nice and quiet!" She lit a cigarette and threw back her head to watch the smoke curl up to the low, dark ceiling. Then she told Shu-hsiu with a smile, "I've come from the women's ward at the east end of the compound. I couldn't stand going hungry any longer. You know they've been on a hunger-strike for the last three days?"

Tao-ching was startled at this news and could not help asking. "A hunger-strike? Where? . . . Oh, of course, we heard about it! How can they be such fools?"

"You're right, they're absolute fools." Pleased with Tao-ching's reply, the woman turned to her. "Even those who aren't Reds are following the Communists' example. They're making a great commotion to protest against the Kuomintang's secret arrests, secret executions, failure to resist Japan, betrayal of the country and all the rest of it. . . . It's much quieter here. Well, let them stir up trouble if they want to." She turned back to Shu-hsiu to ask, "Did anyone send you a message, dearie? I was told that three or four hundred prisoners started this hunger-strike together, after exchanging secret messages."

Tao-ching's suspicions were now thoroughly aroused. But before she could decide how to answer, Shu-hsiu said:

"So that's it! I was just going to ask who proposed this strike. No one sent us any message. I wonder why not? It's too bad!"

"You silly child! The Reds didn't let you know because they don't trust you! So we may as well eat our fill for a couple of days. They made me fast because I was in the same cell, but I couldn't stand it." Hunger had driven this secret agent posing as a prisoner to show her true colours.

Shu-hsiu's expression suddenly changed. Fixing angry eyes on the bloated spy, she spat at her.

"For shame! How disgusting and mean! But coming here won't help you, because we're going to join in the hunger-strike too!"

The woman was dumbfounded.

Tao-ching, watching Shu-hsiu's sensitive, indignant face, smiled faintly to herself and after a slight pause said to the spy:

"Thank you for telling us about the strike. If not for you, we'd have let the others down!" She said firmly to Shu-hsiu, almost as if giving an order, "We mustn't wait any longer, dear. From now on we'll refuse all food!"

Shu-hsiu nodded and tears ran down her cheeks as she answered softly, "I'll do whatever you say, Tao-ching. Now that Sister Cheng is dead, I'll follow your lead. . . . All right?"

The spy stared at them incredulously, straining her ears to catch all they said and watching their every movement. Soon her cigarette burned her soft fingers and with a cry of pain she threw it away. Uttering a scornful laugh, with her eyes on the ceiling she said bitterly:

"I shouldn't have come here if the wardress hadn't told me you were sensible people who refused to join in the strike. Now I find you're both Reds too! And I'd meant to ask the higher-ups to set you free! . . . Confound that lying wardress!"

The fact was that Wardress Liu, who had come under Lin Hung's influence, was afraid Tao-ching and Shu-hsiu were too weak to join in the general hunger-strike and had deliberately withheld the news from them, while at the same time she had told the prison authorities that they were against the strike. She had gone on bringing them food, good food too when she could get it. Because the two girls were confined to their beds, they knew nothing of what was going on outside.

Neither Tao-ching nor Shu-hsiu said any more, but when lunch was brought in, they lay still and ate nothing. The spy made another attempt to induce them to eat. She had taken them for weaklings, easily swayed, which was why she had revealed her true colours from the start. The food the wardress brought in was quite appetizing, with sausages, steaming rice and a savoury stew; but neither of the girls even looked at it. The spy, however, ate greedily and smiled coaxingly at Shu-hsiu.

"You're only sixteen, dearie. Why be so foolish? If your mother knew you were starving, how bad she'd feel! Look at this! Come and eat something, and when you've finished I'll have you sent home."

Shu-hsiu glanced at Tao-ching, who met her eyes steadily, neither spoke. Finding that she had met her match, the woman, who had made a hearty meal, pulled the quilt over her head and went to sleep. When Wardress Liu brought in supper, she urged the two girls to eat, but they politely refused. After another substantial meal the spy slept again, snoring so loudly that Tao-ching could not get any rest. Towards midnight she started coughing softly, and at once Shu-hsiu raised her head to ask:

"Are you still awake, Tao-ching? Do you feel hungry?"

"No, Shu-hsiu!" answered Tao-ching in a voice that trembled. "But it's not easy to go without food, dear. Do you think you can stick it out?"

Some minutes passed before Shu-hsiu's reply:

"I think I can. Whenever I come up against any difficulty now, I seem to see Sister Cheng standing before me. Don't worry about me, Tao-ching. I'm not in nearly such a bad way as you. It's your condition that worries me."

"I'm all right. I'm still young and well on the way to recovery." Tao-ching's blood was racing and her cheeks flushed with excitement as she said softly, "You know, Shu-hsiu, we're sure to win! It's not just the two of us — hundreds of prisoners have gone on strike. It's really a great struggle! Cruel as Chiang Hsiao-hsien is, he dare not starve us all to death."

"I'll follow your lead, Tao-ching, whatever you do. I shan't mind even if I starve to death." Shu-hsiu choked back her sobs, not wanting Tao-ching to know that she was crying.

"Silly child! Why should anyone choose to starve to death?" The spy's loud voice startled them both. She had only been pretending to be asleep and now set to work on Shu-hsiu. "They say 'A wise man listens to advice.' You're only a girl — why die for the Communists? Think of your father and mother! Have you a boy friend? Imagine the young lovers in the parks now, laughing and chatting happily together. Don't you envy them?"

Silence followed. Both girls chose to ignore such base overtures. The small, dark cell was dank and musty. Shu-hsiu stopped crying and gritted her teeth as she pressed her hands to her stomach, tormented by hunger. In her fury she was tempted to rage at the spy.

The next afternoon, seeing she could achieve nothing here, the spy got up, patted the dust from her clothes and waddled off with a vicious parting glance at the two girls, who were now too weak to move. A few minutes later, Shu-hsiu was dragged out for questioning. She was carried back covered with blood, her face badly bruised, her hair loose about her neck, too exhausted even to weep. Guards threw her down on the hard, wooden cot as if she were a corpse.

When she came to under Tao-ching's anxious eyes, she hastened to say:

"I didn't tell them anything, Tao-ching! I'm only an ordinary, ignorant schoolgirl. How do I know who started it all? . . . I didn't give in. I'm going to keep on fasting with all the others." Without having shed a single tear, she lost consciousness again.

Tears rolled down Tao-ching's cheeks — dear Shu-hsiu! China could be proud of daughters like her.

One day dragged past, then a second and a third. Tortured by hunger and their painful wounds, they lay in a stupor most of the time. Since Wardress Liu's transfer for not telling the truth, the cell for women casualties was as gloomy, musty and quiet as a grave. But each time they regained consciousness and opened their eyes, they exchanged warm, loving glances. Once Shu-hsiu stretched a thin, trembling hand towards Tao-ching and her pale lips quivered as she murmured:

"Mother! You're like a mother to me! . . ." Tao-ching was as dear to her as Cheng Chin or her own mother. Tao-ching's gentle, loving eyes and her courage, which equalled that of Cheng Chin, brought home to Shu-hsiu the invincible strength of the revolution, a strength that filled men's hearts with warmth and inspired them to noble deeds.

On the fourth day — the seventh day of the general hunger-strike — Tao-ching was aroused from her coma by something striking lightly against her face. With a start, she instinctively put her hand to her cheek. A tiny ball of paper rolled down her pillow. Unfolding it, she read this message which was scribbled in pencil:

> All your fellow prisoners are very glad to know that you joined in the struggle by taking part in the hunger-strike. Today we are ending the strike. The authorities have granted some of our demands. We hope you will eat as usual and take good care of your health. Don't eat too much to begin with. We'll keep in touch.

Tao-ching roused Shu-hsiu and handed her the note. As the girl read it, her thin hands trembled.

"Is it really true, Tao-ching? Let's start with a little congee, shall we?"

Tao-ching laughed, although she was now only a shadow of her former self.

"But we must make sure this isn't a trick. The enemy will stoop to anything. Better wait and see. . . ."

Two hours later it was time for supper. The clanking of food-pails and the curses of the orderlies or guards could be heard in the passage outside the cell.

"To hell with them! If they meant to starve, why not make a proper job of it? Why start eating again — and demanding congee too! They were just bluffing, the scum!"

When the new wardress asked roughly if they wanted any supper, Tao-ching replied directly:

"We want the same as all the others. Some congee, quick!"

In unity there is unlimited strength. Once Tao-ching knew that she and Shu-hsiu were not alone or helpless in their struggle, she felt that she was part of a great yet invisible collective. Though iron walls separated them from the others, in their hearts they were closely bound together. True, lying in that dark, isolated cell, they could not see all the resolute individuals who made up the collective; but it seemed to them that countless warm arms had been thrown round them and countless ardent cheeks pressed against theirs. They were one with the other dauntless, death-defying prisoners. The note thrown into their cell acted like some miraculous potion, restoring the strength they had lost through sickness and torture. After a meal of congee, their spirits soared. That night Shu-hsiu stole over to Tao-ching's bed and lay down beside her to whisper:

"Tao-ching, do you know what? I've just realized the full meaning of our struggle. Before today, I never dreamed that there were so many people here as brave as Sister Cheng!"

Tao-ching smiled, her face calm and happy. Unconsciously imitating Cheng Chin, she stroked Shu-hsiu's soft hair and answered eagerly and tenderly:

"I'm so happy today, Shu-hsiu! I feel I've taken another step forward in my understanding. The enemy can never isolate us again — we shall always be a part of the revolutionary family."

Chapter 21

On her return to Peiping Tao-ching had failed to find Hsu Hui, who had left the university to do some temporary liaison work, on the instructions of the municipal Party committee. Hsu Hui did not learn of Tao-ching's arrest until she came back after the summer vacation and then, unable to visit her in prison, she tried to get news of her indirectly. Returning to her hostel at dusk one day, she had just reached the door when she heard a voice calling:

"Miss Hsu Hui!"

She stopped and looked around, but there was nobody near except for a man who was revealed by the dim lamplight, lying under a tall tree by the gate. She walked over to him. He looked like a maker of coal-balls, was shabbily dressed, had long unkempt hair, and his face and hands were grimed with coal-dust. At her approach he rose slowly and said hoarsely, "Miss Hsu, I've brought you a letter from home."

"Why, it's you, Old Li!" exclaimed Hsu Hui in a hushed voice as she glanced cautiously round at the passers-by. "Follow me to that lane in front!"

"This is an appropriate place for a chat," said Chiang Hua when they reached the door of a coal shop. Looking at her steadily, he continued, "I got in from the country at noon by train. I've no money for food, nor any clothes to change into. Have you any money on you?"

"Here! This is what I owe you for your coal-balls!" said Hsu Hui, handing him all the money she had in her pocket as somebody walked past. As soon as the passer-by was gone, she resumed, "It's a long time since I heard from you. What have you been doing?"

"Helping with the struggle in the countryside. . . . Well, we can't have a real talk here. I must be off. I'll come to see you in a day or two." He had taken two or three steps when he turned to ask, "How are things going? I've had no news of any kind for a long time."

"The Party's launched an extensive movement in northern China to arm the people. It's organized the Association for Armed Defence of the Nation and put forward the slogan 'Fight to Defend Northern China'. . . ." Hsu Hui fired this information at him in a low voice, then paused to catch her breath and look around. "Let's talk as we go. . . . Well, more than three thousand people, including Soong Ching Ling and Ho Hsiang-ning, have signed and support the 'Fundamental Programme of the Chinese People's Resistance Against Japan.' You must have read about that, haven't you? Oh, did you know that Lin Tao-ching's been arrested?" Her face clouded over at this point.

Chiang Hua stopped to stare at her for a moment.

"So she's been arrested?" he said. "Did she give you my letter?"

"No. Was it important?"

"It was written in code, for fear something might go wrong." After a pause he went on, "I must say goodbye to you and turn right here. I'll come and have a good talk with you one of these days." With this, he strode back in the direction from which they had come.

Soon after Chiang Hua and Tao-ching parted at Tachen Village, he had been sent back to Peiping by the Hopei Provincial Committee of the Party. Having been without money and on short rations for some time, he could not buy a ticket to Peiping, but managed to hide himself in a waggon of coal. As a result he was covered from head to foot, not excepting the inside of his ears, with coal-dust. This would not have been so bad if he could have reached his destination without a hitch, but when the train stopped at Paoting he was discovered by the railway guards. All would have been well if he could have offered them some hush money, but he was penniless and had gone hungry for two whole days. So the guards took him for a thief and gave him a thrashing before letting him go. Being beaten or spat at meant little to Chiang Hua who, while working in Tangshan some years before, had often been set upon by the guards for stealing rides when he had no money for a ticket. He knew that once it became clear there was nothing to be made out of him he would be released, and could then attempt to smuggle himself on to the next train that came past. He was one of those men who never stop short of their goal, whatever the hardships and difficulties in their way.

After his beating, he managed to hide on another train at a small station next to Paoting and, alighting utterly exhausted in the west suburb of Peiping at noon that day, he had lain down in the fields to rest. When he got up and realized how filthy he was, he limped to the deserted moat skirting the city wall and slaked his thirst before attempting to wash his face. He could not get rid of the grime however hard he tried, because his whole body and shabby clothes were impregnated with coal-dust, which soiled his hands and face almost as soon as he had washed them. With a rueful smile he abandoned the attempt and, tightening his belt, directed his steps towards the city. Two days without food had so enfeebled him that he dragged himself along like a sick man. He hummed a ballad a strolling coal-ball maker might well sing — *A Young Widow*

Weeps Over Her Husband's Grave. Having looked in vain for two comrades, he went to Peking University to find Hsu Hui. In view of his disreputable appearance, he thought it inadvisable to ask for her at the gate, and therefore stretched himself out beneath a tree in front of the hostel to lie in wait for her.

Three days passed and Chiang Hua was no longer a dirty coal-ball maker. Dressed in a neat uniform buttoned up to the neck, and with an old panama on his head, he was strolling in a leisurely way through the hot sunshine to see Hsu Hui. He had an unexpected encounter.

"Well, Old Chiang! Haven't seen you for a long time!"

He turned to see a big-headed, short, middle-aged man in a faded jacket bearing down on him.

"Old Meng! You!" Chiang Hua smiled and clasped the hand gripping his own.

This was Meng Ta-huan, who had been a platoon commander when Chiang Hua served with the North Chahar Anti-Japanese Allied Army. Originally a shop clerk, Meng Ta-huan had joined the Northeastern Anti-Japanese Volunteers before being transferred to the North Chahar Army. Now he took Chiang Hua cordially by the arm.

"Well met, friend! How often I've thought of you!"

Since Meng was wearing worker's ragged clothes and smiling so warmly, Chiang Hua asked:

"Well, Old Meng, what have you been doing the last year or two?"

"I tell you, I've been quite frantic!" He drew closer to whisper in Chiang Hua's ear, "It was just my luck to lose contact with the Party. I've been wandering round Tientsin, Peiping and these parts picking up any jobs that were going and trying hard to get in touch with our people — but with no success! Now I've had the luck to run into you. Come to my place with me, we've so much to talk over."

As Chiang Hua hesitated, Meng said earnestly:

"Ah, those were the days! It didn't take our Allied Army long to recapture cities like Paochang, Tolun, Kuyuan and Changpei or to rout the Japs as well as traitors like Wang Ying and Li Shou-hsin. But that son-of-a-bitch Chiang Kai-shek. . . . Of course, you know our Party's gaining strength again." He blinked his small eyes with a satisfied smile. "I must find the Party — will you recommend me? Who's your contact now?"

Chiang Hua's considerable experience in White territory had immediately put him on his guard against this fellow, met by chance in the street, and from whom he had not heard for years. He forced a smile and shook his head with an air of indifference.

"I've long washed my hands of all that, and lost touch with all the people we used to know. I'm just back from the country and looking for a job."

A barely perceptible shadow of disappointment flitted over Meng Ta-huan's face, but the next moment his lips curled in a smile and when Chiang Hua was about to bid him goodbye he took him by the arm.

"No, I don't believe you! Impossible! . . ." he said hastily. "But that doesn't matter. We don't meet old friends every day, so why not come to my place for a good talk?" He propelled Chiang Hua southward down the street.

There being no alternative, Chiang Hua yielded reluctantly to the request. On the way they talked at random about mutual friends. Meng was coarse and uncultured, but judging by his conversation he seemed quite progressive, heaped abuse on the decadent society and begged his friend to help him join the ranks of the revolution. Chiang Hua was casually evading this issue when a garish young woman in a flashy pink gown approached them. Her hair was waved and her lips were heavily rouged. Chiang Hua glanced at her and remarked with a laugh:

"Look there! While Generalissimo Chiang is promoting the New Life Movement, some young ladies still dress themselves outrageously. Did you hear that Mayor Yuan went to the length of standing at the gate of Chungshan Park to arrest any women with bare arms who passed by? A good joke, isn't it?"

Meng Ta-huan sniggered and licked his lips as he stared at the white nape of the young woman's neck and her soft bare arms. A faint sardonic smile flashed across Chiang Hua's face.

Chatting and walking, they soon reached Kungan Street north of Chien Men. At the gate of the Public Security Bureau Meng Ta-huan stopped and looked hard and meaningly at Chiang Hua, who gave him a push and asked:

"Why stop here, Old Meng? Don't tell me this is where you live?"

"No, not I but you! You've reached home now!" Meng Ta-huan barred the way and his whole face changed as a foolish, triumphant smile spread over it. "Let us not beat about the bush, Old Chiang. I'm working with the secret police!"

The outlook was black for Chiang Hua, whose worst fears had come true. Still he maintained his self-possession and with an incredulous air clapped Meng on the shoulder and protested affably:

"Come off it! You always liked to have your joke, but you've no call to fool an old friend like me. Let's find some place for a chat outside Chien Men. Didn't you say you had a lot to tell me?" Like Meng, he had also changed his tone.

Embarrassed by considerations of "face" and eager to distinguish himself by winning over this Communist, the renegade hesitated for a moment, then beckoned to the guards at the gate of the Bureau. Four plain-clothes agents rushed out to surround Chiang Hua, while Meng Ta-huan swaggered inside, wagging his big head. He reappeared proudly in a new gaberdine uniform, and a boater tilted at a rakish angle.

"Let's go!" He grinned at Chiang Hua. "We'll do as you want and find a place for a chat."

They walked side by side towards the southern city outside Chien Men, the four secret-service men following two by two.

"Well, Old Chiang, you can't say I let old friends down." Meng slapped his chest as he strutted along, a cigarette in his mouth. "When I help a man I make a thorough job of it. I want you to join our unit. How about it?" Screwing his head around, he gave a broad grin. "Apart from good pay — a hundred yuan or so a month — you can enter any theatre, bath-house, bus or brothel free of charge. You liked that bitch we saw just now, didn't you? Well, there are plenty more like her in the bawdy houses. Wherever you go you need only shake your head, put your hands on your hips and purse up your lips, and no one will dare to lay a finger on you!" With a villainous scowl he gave a demonstration of what he meant. "What a fool I was to join the damned Anti-Japanese Volunteers and Anti-Japanese Allied Army, to suffer the torments of hell for three long years! Thank heaven, my luck's turned now and everything's going my way. Clear up a case or arrest a Communist and you'll soon wallow in silver dollars too! So, what do you say to my offer?"

After hearing him out attentively, Chiang Hua reflected for a moment before shaking his head and rejoining with a smile, "I'm afraid I'm the last man for such a post. You've special qualifications for the job, Old Meng, but I've too much of the milk of human kindness in me. I must find some other way to fill my rice-bowl."

"Why, so far as I can see, this is the fattest job you could possibly have." Meng raised one thumb and wagged his big head again. "Let me put your name down for it!"

"No, thanks. As I said, I'm the last man for such a post," repeated Chiang Hua with a smile.

Meng threw him a dubious glance and made a wry face. They had now reached a restaurant outside Chien Men, where Chiang Hua halted and said:

"It's past noon. Let me treat you to lunch."

"All right. No man worth his salt refuses food and drink when it's put before him." Meng followed Chiang Hua upstairs with two of the guards, leaving the two others at the door.

Over the wine, Meng Ta-huan continued to urge Chiang Hua to join the secret service, imagining in his folly that bribery combined with intimidation would induce the revolutionary to turn renegade as he had done.

"Don't you like the sweet clink of silver dollars, Old Chiang? Stop dithering! With me to back you, you can count on quick promotion and getting rich. Believe it or not, I'm already a sergeant!"

With a smile on his face Chiang Hua surveyed Meng's small round eyes, bloodshot with dissipation.

"You weren't all that good when you worked for the revolution, Old Meng, but you're certainly cutting a splendid figure now in counter-revolutionary work. If you steep your hands in blood long enough, no doubt you'll be promoted to sergeant-major's rank. It's too bad I'm not up to this kind of standard." While Chiang Hua was eating, drinking and joking, he was secretly casting about for some way to extricate himself. It was clear that, if he rejected Meng's proposal, he would be taken into custody then and there. Serious consequences would follow his arrest, for the enemy had been hunting him for a long time. The only way out was to escape; but the moment they came upstairs he had seen that his escape was cut off. As soon as the meal was over he paid the bill and suggested to Meng, who followed him downstairs:

"Old Meng, as we've seen so little of each other and there is so much to discuss, what do you say to our going to a film? The Chen Kuang Cinema isn't bad. Let's go there."

With his big head on one side, Meng thought this over and nodded his assent, but instead of going to the Chen Kuang he took Chiang Hua to the Ta Kuan Lou, where he had enough underlings to keep a close watch and prevent his prisoner from getting away.

In the cinema Meng Ta-huan sat next to Chiang Hua, with the four guards near by; and Chiang Hua saw very little of the film, for he was busy watching his companion and trying to think how to get away in the dark. When the screen filled with bewitching bare-legged girls, who swung their hips as they danced, while men and women kissed and embraced to the accompaniment of voluptuous music, he observed that Meng was gaping and drooling. There was not a second to lose. Chiang Hua stood up quietly and put his hat on the seat. His arm was at once gripped by two pudgy hands as Meng cried out in alarm, "Where are you going?"

"To buy some cigarettes," answered Chiang Hua, heading in a leisurely way for the door.

"No, no! Someone else can go. We know you're a Red. Don't try to get away!" Tightening his grasp, Meng called out to warn his underlings to keep a sharper watch on their prisoner.

Chiang Hua sat down again, by no means disheartened. Since flight was impossible here, he had to think of some other means of escape.

Before leaving the cinema he was quickly surrounded by the plain-clothes agents who hustled him and Meng along to the door. When they were out on the street and the crowd had dispersed, Meng glared at him and said shortly:

"We've wasted enough time! Now you're coming with me to the Bureau!"

Chiang Hua stared back indignantly and replied:

"How can you do this, Old Meng, to an old friend like me? Let me think it over again."

"No!" thundered Meng, throwing out his chest. "I've no more time to waste. Come along to the Bureau!"

"All right." Chiang nodded. "But first I've a favour to ask. Before I left home, bandits had been so active in those parts that for safety's sake I remitted two hundred silver dollars to a friend in Peiping. I went straight from the station this morning to get the money, but finding him out left word that I'd look him up again this afternoon. I must go and get that money. How can I embark on a lawsuit without cash?"

Meng Ta-huan's palms itched at the mention of money and he immediately gave his consent. He called six rickshas, wedged his intended victim between the four guards and ordered the ricksha-men to hurry to the address Chiang Hua had given — a small lane inside Huang Hua Men.

When they drew up before a shabby door, Chiang Hua alighted and stepped over to Meng to whisper:

"It's occurred to me, Old Meng, that if you all follow me in, my friend Wang Yu-teh here will guess that I'm in some kind of trouble and will refuse to pay up. What do you think we ought to do?"

Meng pursed his lips and flourished one fat arm. "Just go in alone then. 'A monk may run away but not his monastery.' Don't be long, though!"

The secret-service men kept watch outside for more than half an hour, but there was no sign of Chiang Hua, and, growing impatient, they burst into the courtyard. They found to their dismay, however, that this was no house but a small passageway through the other end of which their prey had escaped. Meng Ta-huan, wild with rage, stamped his feet, swore at his men and felt like boxing his own ears.

Wherever he went, Chiang Hua always took the precaution of finding out and memorizing the topography. When all other means of shaking off the secret police failed, he had remembered this passageway.

Chiang Hua, having extricated himself from this difficult situation, went to see Hsu Hui as he had planned.

Sitting under the electric light in her small neat room in the hostel, he drank some water and said to her with a smile:

"Well, Hsu Hui, I hardly expected to find you still safely ensconced here."

"Yes, it's as secure as sitting on a throne. But give me credit for some resourcefulness. . . ." With a laugh Hsu Hui poured him out another cup of water. Then, having shut the window, she sat down on a stool by his side. "I can see you've gained still more experience, Li Meng-yu." There was a trace of sadness in her smile. "The White terror is getting worse every day. You know that Lu Chia-chuan was taken off to Nanking after his arrest? I'm afraid he's done for. Many other comrades have been arrested too, including progressives like Lin Tao-ching who sympathize with the revolution. Yes. . . . You know what happened to Shen Yi? He's been given a life sentence and I doubt if I shall ever see him again. . . ." She bent her head, her eyes swimming with tears.

Shen Yi, Hsu Hui's lover, was an old friend of Li Meng-yu, now known as Chiang Hua, who had worked with him in the labour movement in Shanghai; this was the bond of friendship between him and Hsu Hui. On hearing this tragic news Chiang Hua, his back to the light, raised his head to stare at a portrait of Montesquieu on the cream-painted wall. A long time passed before he said slowly:

"I know how you feel, Hsu Hui, and nothing I can say will help. We've lost many good comrades in the last two years, apart from those killed in the earlier years since the April the Twelfth Massacre! But no matter what reverses and hardships we suffer, we forget our own grief when we think of the victory that must be ours. Don't you feel that way too?"

"Yes, Old Li, you're right!" Her momentary grief conquered, Hsu Hui tossed back her hair and fixed bright smiling eyes upon him. "I should have asked how you've been all this time, instead of troubling you with that news. Do tell me how you got on in Tinghsien. Wasn't I right in saying you could trust Lin Tao-ching?"

Turning over her lecture notes on the table, he said:

"Let's discuss your affairs first, Hsu Hui. You're not to stay here — the Party wants to transfer you to another post. Can you leave your work here?"

Hsu Hui gazed in surprise at Chiang Hua, who was still bending over her lecture notes.

"You don't mean it, Old Li? I'm to leave the university?"

Chiang Hua put down the notes and straightened up with a smile.

"Yes, you're needed for administrative work. . . . I haven't told you yet that I'm on the East City district committee now. The Party's sent me to notify you so that you can make the necessary arrangements. Tomorrow night you're to go and see Big Sister Liu Yi-feng."

"But I shall graduate in just one more year. . . ." Dismay and uncertainty showed on her face.

Chiang Hua returned her look mildly but gravely. Sometimes a glance is more eloquent than thousands of forceful words. When Hsu Hui saw his expression, her face flushed crimson.

"Of course I'll go wherever the Party needs me," she replied in a clear, firm voice. "I only hesitated just now because our Party branch in Peking University isn't as strong as it used to be, and I'm afraid my going may make matters worse. We've crossed swords with students of the C.C. clique* over the free night-school opened by Peking University and over various other organizations. It's a fierce and complex struggle."

She told him of some of the fights the students had been waging.

Having heard her out, he wiped his perspiring face with a grimy handkerchief and said, "Don't hesitate or just consider the interests of this particular group. Someone else will come to take over your work once you're gone. Let's consider this as settled then, shall we? And now that we've finished talking business, let's have a good chat. It's too hot here — why not go out for a stroll?"

The well-paved road to Peihai Park was one of the quietest and most beautiful in Peiping, but pedestrians were few and far between although the scattered locust trees and dark red palace walls around Coal Hill made a scene of tranquil loveliness at night. Under the dim street lamps, Chiang Hua and Hsu Hui walked side by side talking in subdued voices. Chiang Hua was a warm-hearted and considerate friend, and they discussed their recent experiences and exchanged news of mutual acquaintances. They were speaking of Chiang Hua's work at Tinghsien, when he suddenly turned to ask:

"By the way, do you know Tai Yu?"

"Yes, I do. What about him?"

"I have my doubts about him . . . I'm finding out what I can from different quarters to make a report to the Party. That's what was in the letter I asked Tao-ching to give you when she came to Peiping. I hoped you'd alert the Party here. Well, I'm sure Tao-ching won't have let that letter fall into enemy hands."

"Have you told the Party what you know about the fellow?"

"Yes, of course. There's nothing viler than a renegade. I bumped into one just now on the street and barely managed to shake him off."

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* A counter-revolutionary organization.

Hsu Hui looked at Chiang Hua's calm face in astonishment. Then she said, smiling:

"So it's pretty dangerous for you to work here in Peiping! There are renegades looking out for you on the streets, while in prison. . . . Tell me, what's your opinion of Lin Tao-ching? . . ." Hsu Hui had turned the conversation to Tao-ching because she was worried — although unwilling to say so in so many words — that the girl might be unable to stand up to the enemy's inhuman tortures.

Chiang Hua did not answer immediately, and as he paced steadily forward in the uncertain light she could not see the expression on his face. Some minutes passed before he answered quietly and calmly:

"I don't think she'll let us down. My impression was, she's not only sympathetic to the revolution but ready to work for it in real earnest. . . ." Briefly, he told Hsu Hui of Tao-ching's work as a governess in a landlord family and her efforts to get hold of Sung Yu-pin's black-list. Then he changed the subject again. "Hsu Hui, you must go and see Big Sister Liu tomorrow evening. Right now, we've got to make the best use of every second. As to how to explain your departure to the university authorities, I'm sure you can handle that well."

Hsu Hui nodded and her voice trembled with emotion as she replied, "Don't worry, Old Chiang. I'll obey the Party unconditionally. Is there anything else? It's time for me to go back."

"No, that's all. Only remember to be on your guard! Make over your work in the university to some comrade whom you can trust, because you won't be back for a long time. Another thing: ask Wang Hsiao-yen to try to get news of Tao-ching from time to time. What do you say to asking Hsiao-yen's father to bail Tao-ching out?"

"Good, that's a splendid idea! I'll go and see Hsiao-yen. Goodbye!"

Without knowing it, they had reached the back of Coal Hill which loomed like a camel's hump against the murky sky, solitary and serene. After Hsu Hui left him, Chiang Hua bought a box of matches from a small stall, then turned to watch her slim, nimble figure until it was swallowed up in the dark night. Strolling on alone, he raised his eyes to the pavilion on the top of Coal Hill and suddenly had a vision of Tao-ching's eager, ardent face. His heavy black eyebrows contracted with an inexplicable longing and concern and, while he stared at the pavilion, the figure of the graceful, passionate girl took yet clearer shape in his mind.

Chapter 22

Another year had passed.

In her tidy little room in the Peking University girls' hostel, Wang Hsiao-yen was pacing nervously up and down. She took up a copy of the *Outline of Economics,* but being in no mood for reading put it aside and stood looking at herself in the mirror. Her usually calm and pale face was flushed, her brows were quivering with excitement, and she could distinctly feel her heart beating fast.

"He'll soon be here now! . . ."

At the thought of seeing Tai Yu she felt a thrill of joy. This was the first time she had been in love, and love had not only fired her with youthful ideals and delight in life, but seemed to have strengthened her faith in the revolution and the cause to which she had dedicated herself. Hsiao-yen knew less about the revolution than Tao-ching, but of one thing she was certain and that was that the wicked old society must be overthrown, that the people must rise to fight for the birth of a happy new society where justice would prevail. So when she first met Tai Yu in another student's room and heard the steady youth's bitter denunciation of the Kuomintang reactionaries' shameless crimes, he made a favourable impression on her. She met him a couple of times after that elsewhere, and gradually they became better acquainted. He recommended books to her and helped to explain their contents. He was extremely widely read himself, able to recite whole passages from *Capital* and other Marxist classics to the wonder and admiration of many students. To studious Hsiao-yen, this young man seemed both a revolutionary and a scholar, and as time went by her admiration for him ripened into love.

Tai Yu became a frequent visitor. Each time he came to her hostel, he would tap on the door three times before making his polite, unobtrusive entry.

"How far have you gone with *Capital*?" he asked one day as he sat down readjusting his spectacles to look at Hsiao-yen.

Her cheeks had begun to burn at the sight of him and her heart throbbed with excitement when she spoke, but doing her best to keep calm, she replied without even daring to look at him:

"I've reached Chapter 51: Distribution Relations and Production Relations. I shall soon have finished, but I don't understand it."

"Good for you! That's the attitude a Marxist should take. You say you've reached Chapter 51? Doesn't it say this there?" He turned up his eyes as if in thought and recited, "On the other hand, scientific analysis of the capitalist mode of production demonstrates the contrary, that it is a mode of production of a special kind, with specific historical features; that, like any other specific mode of production, it presupposes a given level of the social productive forces and their forms of development as. . . ." Here he broke off to confess to Hsiao-yen with a smile, "The rest of the passage escapes me. I've such a poor memory."

"Oh, how well read you are! What a wonderful memory you have!" Hsiao-yen's head was shyly lowered and there was genuine admiration in her voice.

Gradually they found it impossible to keep to topics like this. Whenever Tai Yu came, he would sit looking at her in silence for minutes at a time. Hsiao-yen was sure that she loved him, but a strong sense of self-respect made her unwilling to reveal her feelings first.

So they would often sit face to face without a word for some time, then Tai Yu would pick up his hat and take his leave.

Leaning against the door one day to watch him go, she murmured to herself, tears in her eyes:

"He seems to be attracted to me, but why does he never show it in any way?"

Hsiao-yen, suffering the pangs of love, began to lose weight. Sometimes, lying in bed she would say to herself, "I must pluck up the courage to tell him there's a heart overflowing with love for him! If he doesn't love me, I must give up all thought of him." But in his presence, she was too shy to speak.

In fact, Tai Yu had not declared his love to Hsiao-yen because he had not yet got permission from his superiors.

One night he resolved to broach the matter to his mistress. So after some reflection, he nudged the gaunt woman, no longer young, who lay beside him on the double bed.

"Wake up, Feng-chuan!" he whispered. "I've something to tell you."

Wang Feng-chuan — the agent who had helped Hu Meng-an to induce Tai Yu to surrender — opened her sleepy eyes, threw her arms round his neck and murmured caressingly:

"What is it, Old Tai? Let me sleep in your arms a little longer!"

"No, I ought to be going." Instead of making any move, after some hesitation, he added, "I wanted to tell you that a girl in Peking University has fallen for me. I haven't made up to her yet. I've been waiting to ask your advice. . . . Now what do you think I should do?"

Still lying in bed, Wang Feng-chuan lit a cigarette and puffed at it furiously. With her eyes on the ceiling she said icily:

"So you haven't seen much of her yet? Hurry up and make up to her! Grab hold of her quickly!" She turned to cast him a glance both amorous and searching. "True, there aren't many Reds in Peking University now, but there aren't many students on our side either — most of them interested in nothing but study. Is this girl a bookworm like the rest? If she is, go ahead and make love to her, but mind you don't really lose your head over her!" With a fierce glance at Tai Yu, she flung her arms around his neck to demand, "Do you love her?"

"No! . . ." Tai Yu shook his head, neither disclosing his true feeling about Hsiao-yen nor the fact that she was a progressive. The woman, however, was sharp enough to make a shrewd guess, and with a stern look she warned him:

"Love, indeed! You don't deserve to be loved! You don't know what love is and you have no right to it!"

Tai Yu, too intimidated to retort, slowly put on his clothes and left, a roll of papers under his arm.

That evening he went back to Hsiao-yen's room. Not having seen him for two weeks, she blushed deeply and tears stole down her cheeks, but she turned quickly away to hide her emotion.

Tai Yu stood up and walked slowly, almost timidly over to her as she leaned against the window-sill. Putting a hand on her shoulder, he said softly:

"Hsiao-yen, dear comrade! I . . . I . . . love you!"

He took off his spectacles and pressed passionate kisses on her cold, white face.

Hsiao-yen was deliriously happy as if in a dream. She gazed upon the man whom she had loved for so long. There seemed to be tears in his prominent eyes too, but how tired and ill he looked! Horrified by his appearance, she asked, "What's the matter? Aren't you well?" She helped him to her bed, made him lie down and poured him a cup of tea, then seated herself on a stool beside him to watch over him tenderly and silently.

Tai Yu lay for a while, as if in a trance, then opened his eyes to say with an apologetic smile:

"Hsiao-yen, how fine you are! How sweet and good! Ever since I first saw you, I've never been able to forget you — you're as pure as the Madonna. Anyone seeing you must feel conscience-stricken and long to purge his sinful soul." With that he took her hand and kissed it again and again with dry, burning lips.

"No," murmured Hsiao-yen, drawing away her hands but laying her cheek against his. "Ever since I first saw you, Chun-tsai, I . . . too. . . . But you're so much better than I. I've never felt this way about anyone in the world, except Tao-ching. You're like the sun to me."

"Don't idealize me — I'm not like that." Tai Yu, alias Cheng Chun-tsai, responded slowly and hoarsely as he held Hsiao-yen close. "Hsiao-yen, dearest! For your sake I must rouse myself and be a man. . . . Love me, darling! Love me always!"

This had happened a week ago. Now, after a week of eager anticipation, she was to meet Tai Yu again.

Having combed her hair before the mirror, Hsiao-yen looked at her flushed cheeks and smiled. Feeling as though her lover were by her side, she inspected the spotless, orderly room which a pot of jasmine had filled with its heady fragrance. She smiled again as she opened a drawer and extracted a vanity case from a red, carved-lacquer box, a gift from her aunt on her last birthday. She had never used cosmetics, and it had lain tucked away in a drawer ever since. Today something made her take it out and, opening it, she dusted her face with powder. When she saw her reflection in the mirror — the pink bloom of her cheeks looking lovelier than ever — she shyly wiped the powder off again with her handkerchief. She was a girl of simple habits who worked hard at her studies and never wasted time adorning herself; so now, ashamed to be frittering away her time, she quickly left the dressing-table and picked up a book from her desk.

The clock struck three before Hsiao-yen, who every now and then had raised anxious eyes from her book to the window, heard one of her younger sisters call from the courtyard, "Someone to see you, sis!" She cast her book aside and hurried out. Cheng Chun-tsai was sprucer and smarter today than she had ever seen him. Clean-shaven, he was wearing a Western-style suit of blue serge with the collar of his snow-white shirt outside. Hsiao-yen had thought he was thirty or thereabouts, but today he looked hardly more than twenty-five.

This was Tai Yu's first visit to her home and after an appreciative scrutiny he said, "This is thoroughly delightful, Hsiao-yen. Are your people very well off?"

After offering him some refreshments, Hsiao-yen sat down beside him and replied:

"Oh, no! Daddy's salary isn't enough for us, and the government doesn't pay its employees regularly either. We'd starve if we depended entirely on my father's income, but I've a rich uncle who's a bank-manager and often helps us out — that's why we get along fairly well." After a searching look at Tai Yu she added, "You seem much better today. You haven't been ill again, have you? Why do you always refuse to tell me where you live? You know how I'd like to drop in and see you some day."

Tai Yu took Hsiao-yen's arm, his face clouded again. "My dear, the nature of my work doesn't permit it. You must forgive me. . . . How have you been all this week?"

"Very well — except that. I've missed you so much!"

He took her in his arms. When she had recovered a little from his embrace, she tidied her hair and looked at him tenderly.

"Do you know that Tao-ching will soon be released?" she asked. "That scoundrel Hu Meng-an's left Peiping. In any case, Tao-ching isn't a Communist. So daddy's managed to pull some strings and there's every likelihood that she'll be freed. As soon as I know the exact date of her release, I'm going to fetch her home. Chun-tsai, there's something I've been wanting to ask you, but I never quite dared. Tao-ching said you paid her a visit at Tinghsien. She didn't sound too pleased about it. She told me you gave them bad advice — in fact it was you who proposed overthrowing my aunt!"

Tai Yu lit a cigarette and sipped some tea before replying in a leisurely manner:

"She completely misunderstood me! I warned her and a young fellow called Chao not to go to extremes or commit leftist mistakes. My advice was that they should oust a reactionary teacher named Wu but keep in with your aunt. Heaven knows how they came to make such a mess of things. But I was only there for a couple of hours."

"So that's it!" Hsiao-yen heaved a deep sigh of relief and said with a trustful, apologetic smile, "Do forgive me! I must have heard her wrong. She's going to be so happy, Chun-tsai, when she comes out and finds that we've fallen in love. Tao-ching's been in love before. I'm older than she is, but I never had a boy friend. She used to laugh at me for being so prim."

Tai Yu's eyes bulged as he cast a sidelong glance at her and asked with a smile, "Now you'll be able to tell her proudly that you've got a lover who'll soon be your husband — right?"

Hsiao-yen gave him a gentle push and turned her head away, blushing deeply.

"I don't want to marry just yet. Not till I've graduated."

"Of course, I won't force you, dearest. . . ."

After Tai Yu left, Hsiao-yen went in to supper beaming with happiness. Usually so quiet, she was suddenly talkative, teasing and joking with her younger sisters. Struck by this change, Mrs. Wang smiled at her husband.

"Hung-pin, do you know that our Hsiao-yen has got a boy friend?"

Professor Wang glanced from his blushing elder daughter to the two younger ones, and burst into laughter.

"Oh, yes, I've spies who reported it long ago! I've no objection, none at all! Hsiao-yen is twenty-two now. It's time for her to have a boy friend, but. . . ." He took another mouthful and swallowed before he resumed, shaking his head. "But he must be honest and well-educated. How about it, Hsiao-yen? What sort of man is he?"

Hsiao-yen bent her head for some minutes over her rice-bowl before she answered:

"He's all right. He's well read and progressive. Steady and straightforward too. . . ."

"Yes, I understand. During the past year Hsiao-yen's ideas have undergone a great change. As a disciple of Karl Marx she's exercised a big influence on me, too. I take it this young man is another. . . . Well, good luck to you! Things are following their inevitable course: the Kuomintang is so corrupt, it's no wonder there's widespread discontent among the people. . . ." He patted the head of Ling-yen, his youngest daughter, and laughed heartily again, nodding to himself. "So long as you're happy, Hsiao-yen, so am I. But you must be very careful!" He shook his head. "Parents can't help worrying about their children even when it's not necessary."

Hsiao-yen had grown red and white in turn as she looked with heartfelt gratitude at her kindly, affectionate parents and then at her mischievous sisters who were pretending to be shocked by her.

"Please don't worry!" she said presently in a low voice. "He's a fine person. . . ." Looking up she added diffidently, not sure what answer she would get, "Daddy, you know Tao-ching is to be released soon. She's nowhere to go. Can I ask her to stay with us?"

The smile on Professor Wang's face vanished and Mrs. Wang eyed him uneasily.

"She's a good girl but — a bit childish. . . ." He lit a cigarette and puffed thoughtfully at it for a while. "Still, we may as well do the thing thoroughly I suppose. I didn't expect her to be released so soon after I asked your uncle to talk to his friend at the Municipal Government. Let her come here. It seems young people today can't be kept shut up in their studies any longer." He stopped, not trusting himself to continue.

His serious, worried expression as he leaned back in his chair made Hsiao-yen laugh in spite of herself.

"Daddy!" She patted the professor's shoulder and smiled. "There was a time when you wanted me to bury myself in books and leave politics alone. What do you think now of Dr. Hu Shih's scheme to save the country through study?"

Professor Wang stared up at her for a moment as if she were a stranger. Then, thumping the table with his fist, he cried vehemently:

"Everything is developing and changing. Nothing in this world can remain static. That applies to our ideas too!"

Mrs. Wang, seated beside her husband, was busy knitting a green pull-over for her youngest daughter. She glanced at Hsiao-yen now and said with a smile:

"Perhaps you don't know yet, Hsiao-yen, but recently your father has taken to reading philosophy every night for two hours before going to sleep. *Anti-Dühring, Dialectical Materialism, The Poverty of Philosophy*. . . . Those books are way over my head, but they seem to have made a convert of him."

Hsiao-yen beamed at her father, and two deep dimples appeared on her fair oval face.

Chapter 23

With the signing of the Ho-Umezu Agreement in 1935 the Kuomintang government surrendered all its sovereign rights in North China to the Japanese imperialists. Following the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Hopei, the Kuomintang office in Peiping closed and Hu Meng-an left for the south. As a result, Tao-ching and Yu Shu-hsiu, after more than a year's imprisonment, were released on bail in July 1935, because of lack of evidence against them.

Shu-hsiu was to be released first, but she could not bear the thought of parting with Tao-ching. During their airing in the yard just before she left, she went up to her friend and said with tears in her eyes,

"I shan't be able to see so much of you after we get out of here!"

Smiling, Tao-ching patted her shoulder and replied:

"Silly child! Think how you've missed your mother. Now you can go home and be with her again — how happy you'll be!"

"But I'll miss you terribly." The girl pressed her lips together. "I love you and Sister Cheng no less than my mother. I'll never forget either of you. My mother gave me my life, but you — and the Party — have given me something to live for."

Deeply touched by the girl's sincerity and warmth, Tao-ching grasped her hand and looked lovingly into her eyes.

"So long as we take the same road, we'll be together. Don't you see, Shu-hsiu, if we have the same ideals, we are bound together by our common cause though land and sea may divide us."

The other nodded repeatedly and her delicate face lit up. Resting her head on Tao-ching's shoulder, she said vehemently:

"The die-hards and bullies think that arresting us will make us keep quiet. What a hope! They've sent me to a Marxist-Leninist institute here! Thanks to them, I've found the truth!" Looking cautiously round and seeing no one about, she continued hurriedly, "I'm going to make a start as soon as I get out. I'll come and find you and you will be my guide, won't you?"

Tao-ching nodded and disengaged herself with a smile.

Ten days later Tao-ching, too, was set free and Wang Hsiao-yen came to the prison to take her home.

It was lunch time and Mrs. Wang, in a white apron, was busy in the kitchen. Hisao-yen took her friend straight to the dining-room where Professor Wang was waiting for them. As soon as he saw Tao-ching, he raised a brimming glass of wine and exclaimed:

"Welcome! Welcome to the fighter back from the front of the class struggle!" Offering the glass to Tao-ching with a smile, he added, "To the victory of you and your friends!"

"Thank you very much, uncle!" Tao-ching sipped from her glass while the professor emptied his. Then he turned with a smile to Hsiao-yen and his younger daughters. "Sit down, all of you. Hsueh-yen and Ling-yen, why don't you greet your sister's best friend? . . . She may have displeased your aunt, but we welcome her back."

"Welcome, Sister Lin!" The two girls in their early teens fixed friendly, curious eyes on Tao-ching's pale face and stood by her chair rather shyly, not having seen her for so long.

"I'm so grateful, uncle, for all your help," said Tao-ching, but the professor hastily cut short her thanks. A glass in his hand, he was frowning in his impatience to unburden himself.

"No, I'm the one who should be grateful. You've taught my daughter a lot, and she in turn has taught me. I tell you, Tao-ching, she's kept me abreast of current events for the last six months and more. She's opened my eyes to the actual situation by giving me her analysis and views — I assure you it's true! The Kuomintang government is going from bad to worse. Its policy of 'settling troubles at home before driving out the invaders' boils down to the surrender of first the Northeast and then northern China. They're dragging this great land of ours to destruction. . . ." He whipped off his spectacles and flashed them before his daughters with quick, agitated motions, then cried out, shaking his head, "Are we to suffer a small island country to ride roughshod over our ancient land with its five thousand years of civilization? No! I support your struggle — though that word 'struggle' used to give me a headache in the past!" He burst out laughing.

"My dear professor, this is no time for a lecture." Mrs. Wang had come in unnoticed while her husband was airing his political views. She took Tao-ching by the hand and said with motherly concern, "How thin you've grown, my dear! See what they've done to a lovely girl! . . ." Wiping away the tears which had come into her eyes, she said gently to her husband, "I'm sure the young folk know quite as much as you. Help yourselves, everybody! Tao-ching must be hungry after the poor food in prison, so today I've cooked some dishes specially rich in vitamins A and B. Do start now!"

This evoked general laughter and they chatted happily all through the meal. Tao-ching was delighted to see how Hsiao-yen had changed and how much more progressive and happier her friend's family had become. The rich dishes tasted delicious after months of prison fare and she revelled in the homely atmosphere, her new-found freedom and the prospect of working for the revolution again; but this sudden change left her almost as dazed and bewildered as had her arrest more than a year before. It seemed like a dream.

After lunch, Hsiao-yen took Tao-ching to her room. The afternoon sun shone in upon the pot of white jasmine on the window-sill, filling the neat little room with warmth and tranquillity. The girls, by themselves now, clasped hands in silence for a while, too moved to speak. At last Tao-ching said:

"Hsiao-yen, didn't you run after the car the night I was arrested? How often in prison I've thought about that night and the heart-to-heart talk we had. That really sealed our friendship."

"Yes, I couldn't help running after the car," replied Hsiao-yen in a quiet voice, hanging her head. "I was so upset, longing to catch up and snatch you back. . . . I cried that whole night, you know. But that day showed me the true nature of this wicked society and the real viciousness of the Kuomintang. The first time that brute Hu Meng-an was after you, I considered him as an individual; but this last dreadful experience of yours taught me a lesson and opened my eyes." She raised a face shining with happiness, though tears were rolling down her cheeks. Wiping them away, she stroked Tao-ching's thin hand and continued, "I often remembered how you'd quoted these lines from a classical poem: 'No prairie fire can burn it utterly; the spring wind blows it back to life again.' It's true. When you were arrested, I knew I must take your place and carry on your work. If I were arrested, many others would take up my work and fight on. Yes, 'No prairie fire can burn it utterly.' Never!"

Tao-ching lay down exhausted on the bed, keeping her eyes upon her friend as she answered:

"I knew from your letters that you'd become more active and done a good deal of work, and that now you have a definite aim in your studies. I am so happy about it!"

"Did you realize that?" Hsiao-yen was overjoyed by her friend's understanding and praise. "You don't know all the details, though. At the university I've kept close to the people who seem to me to be Communists or members of the Youth League, and to other progressives too. I've joined in all their activities and become an activist!" After a brief pause she continued, "Do you remember Li Huai-ying? She was sorry for you once and helped us out. But now she wants to become a poetess and spends all her time reading Shakespeare. She's the belle of the university now — a regular society beauty. She cuts quite a figure!"

Hsiao-yen was sitting on the edge of the bed with her friend's hand in hers. Tao-ching, who had listened attentively, said with a smile:

"It's the nature of the petty bourgeoisie to waver. Li Huai-ying is by no means an isolated case. . . . By the way, Hsiao-yen, have you any news of my friends Lu Chia-chuan, Lo Ta-fang, Chiang Hua, Hsu Ning and Hsu Hui? I made new friends in prison, but I can't forget my old ones."

"I've heard nothing of Lu Chia-chuan or Lo Ta-fang. Hsu Ning is in the First Prison. Strange to say, his mother heard of me and called on me once. Hsu Hui hasn't come back yet. Somebody did come, though. . . ." She dimpled suddenly, looking younger and more vivacious than Tao-ching had ever seen her. She nudged her friend and went on with a soft laugh, "Somebody called on me at the hostel twice, both times in the evening. He told me his name was Li and asked after you. I suspected that he was that Chiang Hua whom you mentioned. He seemed very concerned about you."

"I doubt it," replied Tao-ching, slightly surprised. "What would Chiang Hua be doing in Peiping? . . . You know, Hsiao-yen, the finest thing that ever happened to me was meeting Lu Chia-chuan, Chiang Hua and Lin Hung, whom I got to know when I was put in prison, but it hurts me to think of them. Lin Hung has been killed, and maybe Lu Chia-chuan too. . . . Well, let's hope Chiang Hua is here in Peiping. Do you know how to find him?"

"No." Hsiao-yen shook her head and, gazing at her friend, said in a subdued voice, "I've heard about Lin Hung — didn't she call herself Cheng Chin?"

"How did you know?"

"Yu Shu-hsiu told me. She came to see me the day she was set free and talked for hours about her life and struggle in prison. She told me what an influence you and Lin Hung had on her." Hsiao-yen closed her eyes and sighed. "The moment I shut my eyes, I seem to see that lovely, resolute woman."

Tao-ching covered her eyes with both hands as she lay there and said slowly and thoughtfully:

"A woman like that doesn't die. She will live for ever. . . ."

At this point Shu-hsiu came darting into the room. As soon as she saw Tao-ching, she rushed forward to hug her, crying joyfully:

"I'm so glad you're out, Tao-ching! Mother wouldn't let me go to the prison to meet you; but I knew you'd be coming here, so I managed to slip out and came straight over. Oh, isn't this splendid! Now we can fight together against that monster Chiang Kai-shek!"

As Hsiao-yen stood fondly watching the lively passionate girl, she was amazed by Shu-hsiu's gaiety and determination to take the right road after tortures surely too cruel for one so young. Her eyes filled with tears of affection.

Tao-ching had sat up in bed to hold the girl by her thin shoulders and look into her face.

"I believe you've put on a little weight, child. What good things has your mother been cooking for you?"

"Nothing!" Shu-hsiu pouted. "Mother's been scolding me, and father too. You know I was arrested on a false charge; well, they say it served me right for being careless enough to take a book with a red cover to Peking Library. They've no idea that I went into prison a suspect and have come out a real revolutionary! They've warned me that if I'm caught again I may really lose my head. So they're keeping a careful watch and won't let me leave the house. They've taken away all my books on revolutionary theory. My father's a coward and of course mother follows his lead, praying to Buddha to preserve me. What time does she have to cook good things for me?"

This diverting recital made Tao-ching and Hsiao-yen laugh, but Shu-hsiu did not join them. Giving both of them a push, she frowned and cried:

"What is there to laugh at? I'm serious and I've come to you for advice. I want to join the Red Army or go to work in a factory so as to become a real proletarian. Whatever happens, I won't stay at home any longer."

"All right, my dear, but don't get so excited!" Tao-ching took the girl's hand. "We'll help you, but you must have patience. Don't do anything rash or you'll break your parents' hearts. Revolution isn't something we go round talking about. To join the Red Army or work in a factory, you must first get in touch with the Party — we can't just follow our whims."

At this, Shu-hsiu began to calm down. Raising her head she inquired with widened eyes:

"Are you in touch with the Party yet?"

"No, I only came out this morning."

"Please tell me as soon as you are! I must be off now." The girl darted out again, forced to leave Tao-ching after this short visit rather than offend her parents.

Tao-ching and Hsiao-yen talked in bed that night, they had so much to tell each other.

"Hsiao-yen, in the past year or more, have you fallen in love? You'll have to some time, you know!"

"Yes, I have," was the quiet reply. "You know him, too. But I haven't made a final decision yet."

"Who is he? Someone I know?"

"Yes, Cheng Chun-tsai — or Tai Yu."

"Tai Yu? . . ." Tao-ching's heart missed a beat, but she could not bring herself to voice her suspicions to her friend. After a long pause she went on hesitantly:

"Tai Yu? Well, congratulations! How did you meet?"

"In Fang Shu-ling's room at the university," replied Hsiao-yen with animation. "He and she are from the same province, and after we'd met several times there we became friends. . . . He can recite whole chapters of *Capital*."

"Do you know all about his past?"

Hsiao-yen, sensing the disapproval implied, answered uneasily, "No, not yet. . . . But I'm going to find out more about him." She evaded this vexed topic to ask abruptly, "What about you, Tao-ching? Haven't you anyone?"

"No." Tao-ching smiled. "The only men we saw in prison were the gaolers."

"But honestly, is there no one you love?" persisted Hsiao-yen gently, as if forgetting the uneasiness her friend had just betrayed.

There was no answer. When both had been silent for a while, Tao-ching began to speak slowly as if there were a lump in her throat, each word costing her a pang of pain. "You don't understand, Hsiao-yen. . . . I've given my heart and I shall never change. I don't mind how long I have to wait for him."

"Who is he? Tell me! You never gave me a hint of this before!" Surprise and excitement sounded in her voice.

Tao-ching jumped out of bed and turned on the light, tore open the hem of her blouse, and extracted a thin folded paper. She smoothed this out and handed it to Hsiao-yen.

"Don't laugh. This is something I wrote in prison. A poem about him."

Torn between wonder and alarm, Hsiao-yen read it. And the closely written lines showed her the agony of longing in her friend's heart.

You are a flash of lightning
Cleaving the dark, stormy night;
Utterly fearless,
Utterly sublime!
High above you light my way through life —
I am just a raindrop falling at your command.
Whither so fast, my bold lightning?
Where are you now?

We never bared our hearts,
Never came to any tacit understanding,
But I believe in you,
I shall always believe
A miracle will come to pass:
The iron dungeon doors are knocked down,
And out in the garden, my friend,
On a lawn like green velvet,

You are smiling at me,
You are telling me in a soft voice
Of your brave deeds and hard fought battles.
How fortunate I am!
We shall never be parted again!
But, dear friend,
Where are you now?
Shall we meet again in this life?

Ah, friend,
Where are you now?
Where are you now?
Do you know
That a girl in the flush of spring
Is waiting eagerly for you?
Love deep and unchanging is hidden in her heart,
She will wait for you for ever.

Tao-ching had sunk down by the table burying her head in her arms. When Hsiao-yen finished reading her face was flushed and her eyes wet with tears. She stepped up to her friend and said softly:

"Tao-ching, I understand you now — your suffering and your hopes. . . . And I'm sure a day will come when we shall break down every prison door, when all lovers will be able to talk to their hearts' content in beautiful gardens. . . . That day is sure to come!"

"Yes, it is sure to come!" repeated Tao-ching steadily, raising her head.

Chapter 24

Standing by the window, Tao-ching kept her eyes fixed on the pot of jasmine on the sill. She was rather uneasy. Shortly before her release Chang Hua-ying, who had kept in touch with her in prison, had told her that someone would call on her directly she was out; but two days had passed and nobody had come. Who would this new Party contact be? . . . She had stayed in while Hsiao-yen went to a lecture, in order not to miss the visitor she expected.

Around ten o'clock Chiang Hua made his appearance. Surprised and overjoyed, she hurried to meet him and gripped his hand with a smile.

"Why, Old Chiang! It's almost two years since last we met."

"Yes, more than a year. You're just out, I understand."

Chiang Hua looked like a government employee in his blue silk gown and black leather shoes. His hair was a little tousled, but his kind eyes were as steady and confident as ever.

"So much has happened since we parted at Shentse. . . ." Looking at him with dancing eyes, she did not know what to say. Chiang Hua was smiling too, but noting how pale and thin she had grown he remarked:

"Tao-ching, you look taller."

She burst into laughter. "What nonsense! Still growing at my age? Perhaps losing weight has something to do with it. . . . Sit down, Old Chiang. Let's have a good talk."

"I'm afraid I'm in a hurry. I've only a few minutes to spare. By the way, can you write an account of yourself today?"

Tao-ching looked astonished.

"What for?"

"Didn't Chang Hua-ying speak to you about it? Your dream's going to come true, Tao-ching, because you proved yourself in prison. It's been decided to admit you to the Party." Chiang Hua's broad, ruddy face was radiant.

Tao-ching stood rooted to the ground, overwhelmed with happiness. She flushed and stared, round-eyed, unable to speak.

"Is it true?" she asked herself. "Is my dream of all these years going to come true? Am I really to know the greatest happiness on this earth? . . ." Her eyes were moist as she smiled shyly at him. Her lips quivered as if to speak, but her tongue failed her.

"In your statement, stick to facts," added Chiang Hua in a low voice. "Don't hold anything back from the Party."

"Of course not! I can be quite honest with the Party."

Tao-ching spoke softly and unhurriedly, trying to control her jubilation. She smiled at him. "So it was you Chang Hua-ying had in mind when she told me somebody would be coming to see me! Surely we needed no introducing, Old Chiang?"

"No, that's regular Party procedure." His tone was cool and business-like, for Chiang Hua was naturally reserved. Though pleased and indeed deeply stirred by this fresh encounter with Tao-ching, he appeared calm and even offhand. A few minutes later he took a hasty leave. Only the affectionate look he turned to give her as she stood at the gate, seeing him out, hinted at the warm feeling and friendship he had kept hidden.

"Just a minute!" she called, running up to him as he stopped. "Can you tell me what sort of person Tai Yu is?"

"Tai Yu? What's your opinion of him?"

"I can't help finding him different from the rest of you." When Chiang Hua remained silent, she continued, "Did you know that he and Hsiao-yen are in love?"

"No, I didn't. In that case. . . ." He paused before going on, "You'd better leave Hsiao-yen's place as soon as you can. Let's meet at Peihai Park tomorrow to talk things over, but don't take Hsiao-yen into your confidence any more."

Tao-ching, though startled, nodded and said nothing.

The great day came at last.

It was a summer afternoon. A dense pall of dust hung over the sweltering streets, enveloping the whole city — grey buildings, grey traffic and grey passers-by — in a thick, stifling haze. Peiping looked infinitely old and weary. Green branches thrusting up against the blue sky introduced a youthful note, but all else bore witness to the chaos, decrepitude and torpor of the ancient city.

Tao-ching was hurrying lightly along, her heart swelling with a joy she had never known, a joy tinged with awe. Preoccupied with her thoughts, she smiled absent-mindedly at a young man passing by and realized the next moment with a blush that he was an utter stranger.

At last she reached a quiet lane where she found the shabby old house to which she had been directed. Chiang Hua had told her to examine the door and she was relieved to discover two uneven crosses chalked in one corner at the top. She smiled although her heart was beating fast. Knocking gently, she asked softly:

"Is Mrs. Wang at home?"

The door was promptly opened by a slim girl in a print gown, who took Tao-ching's hand and whispered:

"So you've come! Welcome!"

With amazement Tao-ching recognized the clever, capable Hsu Hui, for whom she had been searching so long. But Hsu Hui's appearance here only added to her bewilderment.

"Come in, please, Tao-ching. Big Sister Liu is expecting you." With a wary glance right and left to see if anyone was about, Hsu Hui closed the gate and the two girls went inside.

It was an old-style house with junk heaped in the corners of the little courtyard. Hsu Hui showed Tao-ching into a room where Chiang Hua and Liu Yi-feng were waiting for her. Tao-ching went straight up to the thin, quiet woman and took her hand, crying excitedly:

"Big Sister Liu! . . . We've met before. . . . You were Aunt Li then, weren't you?"

"Comrade Lin, the leadership has read your account of yourself and checked it carefully. Today you're to be formally admitted to the Party." She spoke in a solemn but eager voice and smiled as she pressed the girl's hand.

Tao-ching's heart was pounding. Fixing her eyes on Liu Yi-feng's kindly face, she could not speak for excitement. Since neither of the others said anything, silence descended upon the small, shadowy room.

"Aunty! Since we've guests, why not have dumplings for supper?" called Hsu Hui from outside, worried by their stillness. She put her head into the room, pursing her lips; and Chiang Hua, taking the hint, broke the silence by clattering the dominoes on the table. Tao-ching looked up to find him staring at her. For the first time, in his calm, honest eyes, she saw high hopes and ardent joy. Deeply stirred, she raised her glance to the landscape paintings on the dark wall and her face grew grave, her breathing more rapid. In a flash, the paintings faded to be replaced by a great red flag bearing the hammer and sickle, a brilliant, inspiring flag.

"From now on I'm going to give my life unconditionally to the Party, to the most sublime, most noble cause in the world. . . ." Her voice was little more than a whisper, and she had to break off as tears rolled down her cheeks. . . . These were tears of joy, for she was experiencing the happiest moment of her life now that her wish to become a Communist had at last come true. She was aware that she was no longer an isolated individual but one of the standard-bearers of communism, a fearless fighter in the vanguard to liberate her country and people; aware that she had thrown in her lot with thousands upon thousands of her fellow creatures, to devote her life to winning freedom and happiness for millions.

Dusk was falling. The dim room was quiet.

By degrees Tao-ching grew calmer. When she saw glad tears in the eyes of her two companions, she could not repress a smile. Before she could speak, Liu Yi-feng took her hand and said quietly:

"Congratulations! I am sure our Party has found another good comrade in you, Tao-ching. Our Party can never be destroyed — when one fighter falls another takes his place."

Chiang Hua, who had been silent, stepped up to Tao-ching and also shook her hand, saying, "My heartiest congratulations, Comrade Lin! Ours is a great cause and we have a long way to go. As your sponsor for Party membership, I hope you will always live up to the glorious name of a Communist." He gripped her hand tightly before relinquishing it as Hsu Hui came in. She had been keeping watch while preparing supper in the courtyard, and her fingers were covered with flour, but she shook Tao-ching's hand and congratulated her with a smile. Her shrewd, penetrating eyes were warm and kind.

Tao-ching's eyes shone too as she exchanged firm handshakes with each in turn. Her face was still flushed, her heart throbbing, but she bore herself with new firmness and serenity.

Presently Liu Yi-feng and Hsu Hui went away, leaving Chiang Hua to have a talk with Tao-ching.

"Are you clear about the present situation?" he asked point-blank as he sat down beside the table. "I don't suppose you got much news in prison."

"No, I'm quite out of touch, Old Chiang. Will you bring me up to date? I take a more serious interest in politics now." Remembering how he had quizzed her on current events in Tinghsien, she stole a mischievous look at him and smiled.

Chiang Hua thought for a few seconds before he began:

"The Kuomintang has enforced a rigid censorship. We have to rely on Soviet or other foreign sources for information on the soviet areas, instructions from the Central Committee and news about the Comintern. The *Chiu Kuo Shih Pao,* published in Paris, is quite good and informative. Do you ever see it?"

"Yes. Not often, though. Do tell me about recent developments, will you?"

Chiang Hua began to outline the political situation.

"Well, Japan's armed aggression and the Kuomintang's policy of capitulation have plunged the country into increasingly grave danger. In May 1935, on the pretext that the Chinese government had violated the Tangku Agreement by helping the Northeastern Anti-Japanese Volunteers 'intrude' into the demilitarized zone, the Japanese Kwantung Army put forward unreasonable demands to Ho Ying-chin of the Peiping Office of the Committee of Military Affairs. The reactionary Chinese authorities agreed to these demands and concluded the Ho-Umezu Agreement, selling out northern China. That emboldened the Japanese to demand the withdrawal from Hopei of the troops under Generals Yu Hsueh-chung and Sung Cheh-yuan; and these forces were promptly ordered south to intercept the Red Army. Then Japan demanded the removal of the Hopei Provincial Government from Tientsin, and it was moved to Paoting. Next, the aggressors urged the suspension of the newspapers and magazines which had called for resistance to Japan, and all the papers which had published anti-

Japanese articles were banned. For instance, the *New Life* magazine had an article entitled 'Idle Talk About Emperors' which the Japanese said was an insult to their mikado; so its editor-in-chief was arrested. The invaders' insistence that the Chinese people be taught to be slaves, has made Chiang Kai-shek start burning books and burying scholars alive just as the First Emperor of China did. There has been a whole series of arrests and murders of patriotic students, scholars, professors and journalists. The Ho-Umezu Agreement went so far as to stipulate the closure of Kuomintang offices, and so those in Peiping and Hopei were moved helter-skelter to the south. Even that notorious butcher Chiang Hsiao-hsien, who showed such 'courage' in killing Communists, fled in terror from this enemy. The Kuomintang policy of 'non-resistance' has made traitors rant about 'Sino-Japanese friendship', 'Sino-Japanese co-operation', 'Sino-Japanese mutual aid in the economic field' and 'Pan-Asianism'. Now, after the loss of the Northeast, northern China is in danger of being occupied. The Chinese people cannot tolerate this any longer. Throughout the length and breadth of the land you hear the call: 'Drive out the enemy! Save the country!'

"In fact, the Chinese Red Army is now on its way north to resist the invaders. It set out several months ago on this Long March under the leadership of Mao Tsetung, and has reached Szechuan by way of Kiangsi, Hunan, Kweichow and Kwangsi. A million Kuomintang troops have tried to wipe out the revolutionary forces by means of encirclement or pursuit but they've failed completely. The Red Army captured Tsunyi in Kweichow. It routed the Kuomintang troops at Sungkan in Szechuan, so terrifying the magnates of Chungking that they remitted their money to Shanghai for safety. The revolution is advancing by leaps and bounds. . . ."

"Do you think our Red Army will soon fight its way to northern China, Old Chiang?" asked Tao-ching, who had listened with intense excitement. "Surely it won't be long now before the soviet and the White areas merge and the hammer and sickle are seen all over the country? Don't you agree?"

Chiang Hua smiled. But his kindly eyes were grave as, looking at Tao-ching's flushed, childlike face, he answered solemnly:

"Things are moving fast. There can be no question that the final victory will be ours. The crucial questions now are the timing, the conditions under which we work and the correct leadership of the Party. Stalin once said, 'The enemies of the Chinese revolution — both internal and external — are very numerous and very strong.' So it's rather romantic, Tao-ching, to think that victory will be so easy and quick."

Tao-ching grew very red. In their conversations at Tinghsien, she recalled, Chiang Hua had pulled her up equally abruptly.

"You're quite right," she said. "I know our cause is a great one but the road to victory is neither smooth nor straight. Besides the class enemy at home, there's the enemy from outside — the Japanese imperialists. So our country is faced with double dangers. Believe me, I'm prepared for all these difficulties. . . . All the same, sometimes I can't help dreaming. I do so long to see the day of victory!" She gazed at him, tears in her eyes. "I haven't told you about Comrade Lin Hung whom I met in prison. . . ." She earnestly repeated Lin Hung's message to the Party.

Stirred by her warm heart, her high ideals and her account of Lin Hung, Chiang Hua stared reflectively out of the window for a while.

"Tao-ching, there's something very fine about you," he said, turning quietly to her. "No one can help being impressed by your enthusiasm. . . . I can see how much Lin Hung helped you, and am only ashamed to have done so little myself."

"How can you say that?" she protested. "I've always looked up to you as my teacher and elder brother. I've always been grateful for your guidance. Just like Lu Chia-chuan, you've helped me in every way. . . ." The moment this name passed her lips, she blushed.

Details such as this escaped Chiang Hua's attention, however.

Setting this subject aside, he explained to her what a new Party member should know, concluding:

"You're to do office work, Tao-ching. How do you like that?"

"What will that involve?" she hastened to ask.

"Helping Big Sister Liu with the distribution of literature and liaison work."

"Good! When do I begin?"

"Tomorrow. You must be prepared, mind you, to find the work hard and sometimes very dull." Recollecting something else, he added, "And from now on you must use a different name, because yours is in the files of the Peiping Prison. And don't tell Wang Hsiao-yen what you're doing either. Pretend to be backward. . . . You understand why, don't you?"

Tao-ching nodded, realizing that Tai Yu was involved, but as Chiang Hua did not enlighten her, she refrained from questioning him.

He next asked about Tai Yu's visit to Tinghsien and, when she had related the whole story, told her to write a detailed account of her dealings with Tai Yu and hand it to him in a couple of days. Thereupon the two of them left the house together.

Tao-ching went back to Hsiao-yen's home to find her friend still out. After tidying her things she turned on the light and sat down to read some papers and magazines. She was completely absorbed in this when someone patted her shoulder.

"Tao-ching! What are you looking so pleased about?" Hsiao-yen had slipped in quietly with her books and watched her friend raise her head with a smile, quite oblivious of her presence.

"Oh, you're back, Hsiao-yen!" Tao-ching rose to put her papers away. Looking over her shoulder with a mischievous smile, she asked, "Is Tai Yu coming this evening? I don't want to be in the way."

"Don't be silly! Yes, he'll be here soon. As if you could be in the way! I want you to know each other better." Hsiao-yen took Tao-ching's hand with an appealing look in her candid eyes. "I want you to help me find out all about him. But I believe in him — I'm sure he's a good man."

That same instant Tai Yu came in. Shaking hands with Tao-ching, he said hoarsely:

"So you've been released, Tao-ching. Let me congratulate you! You'll be able to help Hsiao-yen. . . ." A forced smile on his sallow face, he glanced at Hsiao-yen beside him.

They sat down in the small neat room, still brighter when Hsiao-yen turned on another light.

"Don't be a tease, Tai Yu! I'm in no position to help Hsiao-yen — I've fallen a long way behind. A year and more of prison life has made me quite muddled and useless." Leaning against the wall, Tao-ching wrinkled her eyes at them with an arch smile, the picture of empty-headed frivolity.

But she was given away by her unsophisticated friend, who asked Tai Yu with a smile:

"Don't you think Tao-ching has changed enormously since she came out of prison? I've been watching her carefully and noticed a change. She used to be very warm-hearted but rather childish, superficial and quixotic. Now she's entirely different. Whereas she was always talking about her ideals, hopes and difficulties, for the last few days she's spoken of nothing but working for the revolution, for other people. Not a word about herself, except in answer to a question I raised. . . ." She winked and smiled mysteriously at Tao-ching. "She never talks about herself now. She's grown deep, don't you see? Of course, she's as warm-hearted as ever, but that warmth of hers is hidden within a new strength. It's like the energy of a generator, not be wasted or used carelessly."

"Oh, do be quiet, Hsiao-yen!" cut in Tao-ching, laughing. "You're making all that up! Everything seems futile to me now. When I see you take an active interest in politics, I try to do the same to please you, my dear." She tossed her head. "I'm quite content to fritter away my time. I don't want to think about serious questions any more."

Hsiao-yen stared at her in amazement. Nonplussed by Tao-ching's backsliding, she decided not to press the point at present.

Meanwhile Tai Yu sat there moodily, nodding, or forcing a smile from time to time as he smoked one cigarette after another. Tao-ching noticed his coldness but could not comment on it. Hsiao-yen, however, turned to him rather reproachfully and asked:

"What's wrong, Tai Yu? . . ." She looked at him for a few seconds and smiled. "Why are you such a creature of moods, I wonder? Sometimes there's no stopping you talking, but at others you're as quiet and glum as if something were on your mind. . . ." She was too good-natured to say more, for fear of hurting his feelings.

"Oh, there's nothing the matter. You girls are too hypersensitive." Tai Yu turned his bulging eyes towards Tao-ching, as if seeking her approval, before he shifted his glance to Hsiao-yen.

"Hsiao-yen, if you're really concerned about your friend, give her some material help. Look at her clothes!"

"There, if not for you I'd have forgotten! I've been thinking of asking mother for some money, but I didn't like to — they have so little to spare. Today, though, I got hold of fifteen yuan, not much, but better than nothing. Do take it, Tao-ching, to buy something you need." She took the money from her pocket and put it on the table.

"Thank you, Hsiao-yen." Tao-ching smiled. "I'm really short of funds and it's a fact, this gown is worn out and I need a new one."

Hsiao-yen turned to Tai Yu triumphantly.

"See? Isn't that a proof that she's changed? In the old days she would never — or very rarely — accept money. Oh, no, she refused to stoop for five *tou* of rice. . . . But now, for the sake of our common cause, she's ready to stoop for one *tou* if necessary."

"Yes, you're right. She's grown more determined. . . ." Tai Yu chuckled.

His insincere reaction made Tao-ching flush with anger and exclaim:

"Don't talk like an idiot, Tai Yu! You forget that I've only just regained my freedom. If you keep on talking like that, I'll soon be back in prison."

Tai Yu and Hsiao-yen stared at her in utter amazement.

Chapter 25

"Mother" — whenever I call her mother I feel the same warmth and strength as when I think of Lin Hung, whom I shall never forget. Yet she's only thirty-three, not much older than I am.

She's thin, pale and delicate, and although young her back is already bent — the result of long imprisonment and cruel tortures. She's had more than her share of tragedy. Her husband gave his life for the revolution. Her son is missing and she has no relatives left. Yet when you look at her, you can't help being struck by her calm, cheerful eyes. She seldom talks about herself and usually works in silence. Ostensibly we are mother and daughter earning a living as washerwomen, but in reality she's a member of the district Party committee and I'm a liaison worker. When she hands me an important and urgent document, she fixes me with her kind, steady eyes and gives me quiet, motherly instructions:

"Hsiu-lan, take this shirt to Mr. Wang. Be careful with it!" Each time she gives me such a responsible task, I feel a surge of indescribable energy, and her firm, gentle gaze seems to set my heart on fire. She watches me walk out of our ramshackle gate, while inwardly I'm assuring her, "Dear mother, you can trust me to carry out this job!"

These were some of the impressions which Tao-ching used to jot down and then tear up while working underground with Liu Yi-feng. Inspired by the same joy and excitement as Lin

Hung had brought her, she felt an urge to put her feelings into writing.

Our work is hard and exacting — so much to be done and only the two of us to do it. My share is copying, delivering messages, washing and mending — the latter because we need the money. Sometimes I have to work right round the clock eating nothing but a little corn bread during the day, I often feel dizzy by midnight, but mother always sits by my side. Her calm, kind eyes, the fine lines on her face — she has aged before her time — make me forget hunger and weariness and work on with fresh energy. Whenever I work through the night, she sits beside me to keep me company. I copy while she reads. After midnight she stands up with a smile to pour me a cup of boiled water or maybe eat a bun with me. She breaks off less than half a bun for herself, and insists on my eating the rest.

Yes, she often goes hungry herself, but makes sure that I have enough. Last time, alarmed by her thin, tired face, I took the water but gave her the food.

"I'm not hungry, mother," I said. "You haven't had much food during the day. Do eat this!"

"No, you're still young and must take care of your health. I'm responsible to the Party for you."

This dear mother of mine is such a fine character!

Mother not only watches over my physical welfare but teaches me in the most profound yet detailed way. When I started working for the district Party committee, I wasn't altogether happy about the job, though I'd promised Chiang Hua to do my best. I've always been a dreamer and had often dreamed of life in the Red Army or in the thick of fierce battles — a romantic life of storm and stress. I don't settle down easily to humdrum work, not even after all these years. So when they sent me here to do this routine job of copying, running errands, washing and mending, I felt a secret resentment. Though I said nothing, mother soon guessed this, and so one night — one unforgettable night — she taught me a lesson. While he, the friend who will always live in my heart, set me an example too by his fearless fight and heroic death. It's only now that I realize how deeply I have loved him all these years. If he were still alive, if his precious life hadn't been snatched away by the vicious Kuomintang butchers, I should be the happpiest woman in the world! . . . But now my hopes have been shattered. Like my unhappy mother, I have lost the man I love. . . . Writing this, I can't keep back my tears. If I knew which grave at Rain Blossom Mount* were his, I'd go to Nanking and take an oath there to avenge him. . . .

One autumn night a chill wind rustled the torn paper of their windows, and through the gaps the moon high in the sky cast cold, silver beams on to the flushed faces of Liu Yi-feng and Tao-ching. It was a beautiful yet lonely night, and they had gone to bed but could not sleep. After a whispered discussion of their work, they touched on more personal matters. Turning her head towards Tao-ching, Liu Yi-feng said:

"Hsiu-lan, there's one thing you've never told me — is there anyone you care for specially?" Tao-ching had taken the name Chang Hsiu-lan since starting work here.

The girl, usually so outspoken and straightforward, replied after a short pause:

"There is and there isn't. . . . I don't like thinking about him, mother."

"What do you mean? Who is he?"

Tao-ching sat up, threw a jacket over her shoulders and got out of bed. In silence Liu Yi-feng studied her young pretty face which seemed veiled in grief in the moonlight. Perching on the edge of the elder woman's bed and taking her slender hands, Tao-ching confided in a trembling voice:

"You'll be surprised, mother, to hear it's Lu . . . Lu Chia-chuan. I've been waiting for him. . . ."

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* This was used as an execution ground where Kuomintang reactionaries murdered over a hundred thousand patriots. After the liberation, it was turned into a memorial garden in honour of the martyrs of the revolution.

But Liu Yi-feng did not appear astonished.

"So it's Lu," she responded quietly. "Yes, he's one of the best. When did you fall in love?"

"We never did. Not outwardly, anyway, though I knew in my heart that he loved me. That's why I've been waiting for him all these years." In the moonlit room Tao-ching's eyes glittered with tears. She bowed her head and gripped Liu Yi-feng's hand hard. "Do tell me if he's still alive," she pleaded. "Have you any news of him?"

Liu Yi-feng shook her head on the pillow, wondering whether or not to break the sad news. She did not want to destroy Tao-ching's dreams of happiness or break her honest heart. Before she could reach a decision, the girl went on softly:

"I've seldom told anyone, mother, about my innermost feelings. The fact is, I've never met anyone more worthy of love and respect. The first time I saw him, we seemed to be old friends. . . ." Her face was flushed, her voice quivering with emotion, while Liu Yi-feng stroked her hands and listened in silence. "I was so unhappy then with Yu Yung-tse — if only I hadn't met him first! The moment he told me of Lu Chia-chuan's arrest, I knew how deeply I cared. . . ."

Tao-ching leaned against the bed and said no more, reluctant to give rein now to feelings she had repressed for almost three years.

Liu Yi-feng was silent too. A draught was coming from the window and she sat up to draw Tao-ching in beside her, under her quilt.

"My child, I mustn't hold back the truth from you any longer," she said. "He died for our cause. . . ."

"Died for our cause?"

Tao-ching repeated the words mechanically. Then, covering her head with the quilt she was silent. Liu Yi-feng slipped on her jacket, put on the light and fetched a copy of the *Anthology of Chinese Classics* from an old wicker basket. Opening the soiled, discoloured book, she slit open two or three of its double leaves and extracted several sheets of coarse, yellowish paper. She went back to Tao-ching, lying still as if asleep, pulled back the quilt and whispered:

"Don't take it so badly, Hsiu-lan! Here's a letter he wrote you. . . . Forgive me for not giving it to you earlier."

Tao-ching started up and stared incredulously.

"He wrote me a letter?"

"Yes," said Liu Yi-feng slowly. "I received this last September through a friend, who told me to give it to you at my discretion. You were still in prison at the time. It was probably just about then that Lu was killed. I didn't hand it over to you straight after your release because I had no idea what he meant to you, and I didn't want you to grieve. So I've been keeping it." Holding the pencilled pages reverently, she put them carefully in Tao-ching's hands.

Tao-ching received her letter with fingers that trembled. Indeed she was shivering uncontrollably. Tears blinded her eyes and fell on to the paper. At last she pulled herself together to read:

> If you ever read these lines, you will already have become my good comrade. These past years, in wretched gaols, I have been looking forward to your becoming a fighter for the most advanced class in the world, my comrade, one of those who will carry foward our revolution. For every day Communists are shedding their blood and laying down their lives to hasten the hour of victory. . . . Dear comrade, dear Tao-ching, it may be my turn soon — only chance saved me from being killed in Peiping. But now I have lived and fought a few months longer, which is a great joy to me. I am waiting now with an untroubled conscience for the last hour. The most glorious day of my life will be that on which I die for the cause of communism, for the peace and happiness of my country and of mankind. It's possible that by the time you read this, I shall have been put to death on Rain Blossom Mount. But when I recollect that our comrades are legion, that they will carry on

> the fight when we have fallen, that you will be in those ranks and that the final victory will be ours — I feel a great pride and joy.
>
> I have had some news of you and received your letter. I am sorry that we shan't be able to work together again. At this last hour I should like to bare my heart to you. But no, I had better not. . . . Confound the butchers who have robbed us — and so many others — of our happiness! Dear Tao-ching, press ahead as hard as you can! Go all out to steel yourself and be bold to avenge us! Never give up fighting for the cause of communism! With all his heart your sincere friend wishes you happiness. . . .

After reading this, her first and last letter from Lu Chia-chuan, Tao-ching shed no more tears. Suddenly possessed by a strange serenity, she stood there like a lovely white marble statue. Although he was no more among the living, it was not for nothing that she had waited for him and shed so many tears when she thought of him. He had proved worthy of the glorious name of Communist. His love had not needed to be put into words and to the last he had not forgotten her. In the midst of her anguish she felt a deep warmth and comfort which would endure as long as his immortal memory.

The next evening, before sleeping, she sat on the edge of her bed with her head lowered in thought, unable to stem the tears coursing down her cheeks. She had never known true love and could hardly bear to recall the nightmare of her futile affair with Yu Yung-tse. It was her tragedy that when she was old enough to understand the meaning of life, when she had met a man worthy of her love and was ready to lavish on him that heartfelt affection of which only a woman disappointed in love is capable, Lu Chia-chuan should have been arrested! Before she had time to open her heart to him, he was snatched away by the reactionaries. After his arrest, whenever she was at leisure or in time of difficulty and danger, the thought of him filled her with infinite strength and

courage. But the days and months slipped by. One year passed, then a second and a third. . . . And finally she was told, "He died for our cause." Put to death on Rain Blossom Mount! Her heart burned with grief and rage at this cruel blow. She must avenge Lu Chia-chuan, avenge the thousands upon thousands of others who had given their lives for the revolution, avenge her own lost happiness. Standing up abruptly, she seized the hand of Liu Yi-feng who was standing beside her, and, gazing at the elder woman with red, swollen eyes, cried:

"Mother, let me go to the soviet area! I want to take up arms. . . . I can't bear this quiet life here!"

Liu Yi-feng, seating herself on the bed, made no reply. Anguish showed on her pale, set face.

"Hsiu-lan, here's another letter you'd better read. I once went through what you are suffering now." From an inner pocket she drew another sheet of faded paper.

"Another letter?" Tao-ching took the sheet of stained, creased stationery. After an involuntary glance at her friend, she began to read silently:

> March 27, 1928
>
> Dearest,
>
> The expected sentence has now been pronounced, so this is my last letter to you. Don't grieve too much. Remember your time is near and you have heavy responsibilities. Take good care of the child and of yourself as well, so that you can avenge me!
>
> Today did not decide my fate — I've been anticipating this for some time. This is my final home-coming — a glorious death. Believe me, I am not distressed but indescribably proud and happy to have fought to the last for the cause of proletarian revolution. My dear, you are a staunch comrade who can stand up to tests. Let us take our leave of each other cheerfully.
>
> Only one thing worries me: your headstrong temper and your recklessness. Victory can't be won overnight — there's

still a long path ahead strewn with difficulties. Go among the masses in earnest and work hard. On no account do anything rash because of my death!

If the child is too much for you, get someone to adopt it. Don't let a baby hold you back. But for my sake, will you call our only child Nien-lin?*

My last message to you is: Fight to the end! Steel yourself to become a resolute Bolshevik fighter! Have the courage to take up my unfinished task!

Wen-lin

The two women, whose fates were so alike, shared their grief together that night. Wiping away the tears on her cheeks, Liu Yi-feng said:

"My husband's last letter has never ceased to inspire me. Since his death, Hsiu-lan, since I first read that letter, I have changed a great deal. Although I was a worker, I used to be impractical, careless and reckless, often swayed by selfish considerations, but from that time on I gradually became more practical and steadier and did my work more thoroughly. I've kept this letter through the most dangerous times, as a clarion call in our advance and a constant reminder to me." She stood up and turned off the light. Moonlight shone through the torn window paper as she took Tao-ching's hand and her eyes flashed with a rare fire, though her voice sounded sweet and low. "Hsiu-lan, I've been through so much — sometimes I found it hard to bear. . . . First my husband was killed. Many times I heard that a good comrade whom I had seen at a meeting or talked to only a few days before had been murdered. My child — our only son, for whom my husband chose the name Nien-lin — was in the care of a Communist worker's family in Shanghai, but during the White terror they moved away and I couldn't find my child. Dressed as a peasant woman with a basket of vegetables to sell, I paced up and down the lane where they'd lived, looking for Nien-lin, but our only child had gone without a trace. . . ."

---

* This means "Remember Lin".

Tao-ching expected her to break down, but Liu Yi-feng had spoken as calmly as if she were describing someone else's troubles. Yet her lips trembled slightly and her eyes were bright with tears. She apparently wanted to say more, but words failed her. With a crooked smile she became silent.

Tao-ching had been clinging to the elder woman all this time, for since the news of Lu Chia-chuan's death the previous night she had not been able to stop shivering. Watching her friend's haggard face, she asked chokingly:

"How have you managed all this time, mother? It's seven years now since father died."

Liu Yi-feng had regained her composure. She said slowly:

"After his death, I was arrested. Nien-lin was born in prison. During my three years as a prisoner they tortured me cruelly and broke several of my ribs. I was a physical wreck by the time I came out. You probably think I'm in my fifties, don't you, Hsiu-lan? As a matter of fact, I'm only thirty-three." Suddenly she gave an enigmatic smile. "I'm not old, but I've lost all chance of a happy home life. I wish you happiness, though, Hsiu-lan! . . ." More solemnly and earnestly she continued, "I want to give you the advice my husband gave me. Work steadily and conscientiously. Go where the Party needs you most. You don't need a gun to fight the enemy. You can fight with your pen, with your ideas — even a washboard is a weapon in our hands."

"Don't worry, mother!" Tao-ching, too, had grown calm and grave. "Father's letter has helped me to understand. . . . I promise to learn from you, never to stop learning from you veterans!"

Chapter 26

Liu Yi-feng often went out, leaving Tao-ching at home to cook, wash and attend to customers.

One afternoon when the elder woman was out, Tao-ching, having finished copying a document, deftly kneaded half a basinful of corn-flour into dough to make six or seven buns, which she then put on the stove to steam. While washing her hands she heard a sound and, turning her head towards the wall, listened carefully.

"To hell with them! . . . Damn those railway bosses!"

A low groan interlarded with curses affected Tao-ching as much as an infant's cries could have done, and throwing down her towel she hurried over to her neighbour's room.

On the narrow *kang* in the dim, stuffy little room lay a gaunt, sallow young man with unkempt hair and large eyes weary and lustreless above high, protruding cheek-bones. Like a child rejoicing at the sight of its mother, he could hardly conceal his pleasure at Tao-ching's arrival.

"Big Sister, you've come again!" he greeted her, raising his head from the pillow and twisting his bloodless lips into a sincere, naive smile.

"Don't move, please!" urged Tao-ching, leaning forward to prevent him from getting up. "Would you like a drink, brother? Do you feel any better today?" Handing him a cracked cup which she had filled from the kettle, she went on with kind concern, "I'm steaming some corn-bread. When it's ready I'll bring you some to eat while it's hot. I suppose uncle has gone out again? Just be patient and you'll soon be well."

The young man, who had been groaning and cursing so bitterly, became strangely quiet and docile in her presence. As he watched her with his big, lack-lustre eyes, tears of gratitude fell on to his grimy pillow.

"I shall never forget your kindness, Big Sister Chang."

Tao-ching, standing by his bed, was rather embarrassed by the way this young man, who was over twenty, always called her "Big Sister". In his pain and loneliness he had become attached to her and her "mother", who also showed much concern for him. The pleasure he took in their company sometimes made him groan on purpose, tap on the wall between their rooms, or even call out, "Big Sister Chang!" Tao-ching was in fact very busy: In addition to copying and distributing documents as well as cooking and washing, she had

to go out on various errands. In spite of this, however, it seemed natural to her to act as mother, sister and nurse to their bed-ridden neighbour.

She and Liu Yi-feng were living in the backyard of a compound rented by working-class families. There were three rooms with a southern exposure, and of these they had two, the third being occupied by an old widower and his bachelor son, a discharged railway worker. The father had been a railwayman too at one time, but was now making a precarious living as an odd-job man or hawker. Although he worked from morning till night the two of them often went hungry.

The son, Jen Yu-kuei, had been a stoker on the Peiping-Hankow Railway until some falling coal injured his leg, and he had been discharged because he would be unable to work for several months. While his wound suppurated and refused to heal, he could not get out to find a job and had to lie all day in pain on the *kang*. When Liu Yi-feng and Tao-ching first called on him after moving into the house, it was touch-and-go with him, because of illness, undernourishment and neglect. But now, a month or so after their arrival, thanks to their care he had taken a turn for the better. Either Tao-ching or Liu Yi-feng had to go out every day, but whoever happened to be at home would keep an eye on the young man, whose father was out all day. They would light his stove if necessary, and bring him drinking water. They warmed up the food left by Old Jen and served it to the invalid. Hitherto, if there was nothing left to eat, the young man would have gone hungry until his father's return in the evening. Now his new neighbours saw to it that he had food, although it sometimes meant doing without themselves. As Tao-ching was at home more often and took greater care of him, Jen Yu-kuei had become quite devoted to her.

After a few minutes with him, Tao-ching went back to her own room. As soon as the corn-bread was ready, she wrapped up two buns and was just going to take them over when Liu Yi-feng walked in. At once Tao-ching put down the bread to ask in a whisper:

"Any news today, mother? Have you brought any literature?"

Liu Yi-feng took off her blue cloth gown and had a drink before she sat down and replied:

"They say the Central Committee has recently published a most important statement about the present situation; but I haven't seen it yet. Has anything been happening at home, Hsiu-lan?"

"Nothing important. When shall we be able to see that statement, I wonder? I'm longing to know how the Red Army's getting on. . . . You must be hungry, mother. I've just steamed some corn-bread. Won't you have some while it's hot?"

"Oh, I'm not hungry. What's that on the table, Hsiu-lan?" Liu Yi-feng had seen the small package.

Tao-ching blushed. "It's corn-bread. I was keeping some for tomorrow."

The elder woman laughed and scolded gently:

"Silly child, I know you're up to your tricks again. You were going to take that to Jen Yu-kuei and then tell me you'd had a good meal. You'd have given the rest to me and gone hungry yourself, but this won't do, you must think of your health."

"You guessed right, mother," answered Tao-ching with a guilty smile. "But how else can I feed three on what's just enough for two? The old man often makes no more than twenty cents after hawking his goods all day. How can we let a sick man. . . ."

"Yes, you're right. You're right to see it that way. Better take him the corn-bread at once. But don't tell me any more untruths. You must have enough to eat yourself, and another thing, don't talk politics to him. . . ."

"All right!" Before Liu Yi-feng finished speaking, Tao-ching had hurried off to their neighbours' room. Her unselfish, motherly affection for the gaunt young invalid made her take delight in helping him or seeing any sign of improvement in his health.

Jen's father, however, seemed to her a crotchety old man. At first he paid no attention to the two women although they were neighbours, hanging his head with a grim look on his face whenever they were about. His manner improved later on, when he learned of their kindness to his son, although he still had nothing to say to them. Sometimes when Tao-ching and Jen Yu-kuei were talking about the railways or the February the Seventh Strike of the Peiping-Hankow Railway workers, the young man's eyes would light up and his face flush with excitement, while the old man just sat there like a log as if he were asleep. This had made Tao-ching take rather a dislike to him. In spite of the fact that Liu Yi-feng had warned her not to talk about political issues and to be sure not to disclose that they were underground Party workers, she could not help touching on politics sometimes. She was too enthusiastic to restrain herself.

Little by little, Jen Yu-kuei began to change. He improved both in health and in spirits. Whereas before he would lie in bed groaning or cursing to vent his frustration, or read old novels like *Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*, *Canonization of the Gods*, *Tragic Love* and *A Singsong Girl*, under Tao-ching's influence he now began to read *Popular Life*, *World Culture* and other progressive literature which she smuggled in to him. Sometimes she had to stop work and go next door, summoned by a light tapping on the wall — generally when Liu Yi-feng and the old man were out.

"Do you mind explaining something, Big Sister Chang? Can you spare a few minutes? I'm sorry to be such a nuisance. What does class struggle mean? When will the working class win victory?"

On such occasions, Tao-ching would launch with great pleasure into lengthy explanations.

It sometimes happened, however, that the old man, just back from work, would sit outside on the doorstep and listen to them in silence. Once, as Tao-ching was leaving, he blocked her path and cried angrily yet despairingly:

"Do us a favour, miss! Don't ruin us!"

Tao-ching was thoroughly annoyed by his cantankerous ways.

Though he never spoke like that again, Old Jen continued to eavesdrop outside the room.

Chiang Hua was a frequent visitor, in the guise of a customer coming for his laundry. He arrived one day uncommonly elated and put down a bundle of clothing with a pile of secret pamphlets tucked inside. Untying the bundle, he took out a printed sheet, which he handed to Liu Yi-feng. She glanced through it and passed it to Tao-ching, who saw that it was published by the Central Committee and entitled "Appeal to Our Fellow Countrymen for Resistance Against Japan and for National Salvation." This was the *August the First Manifesto*, which was to inspire the whole country, the important statement mentioned by Liu Yi-feng. Tao-ching had seen a copy two days before. Now that the municipal Party committee had printed it for mass distribution, she felt as thrilled as if reading it for the first time. With a glance at Chiang Hua, she read out in a subdued voice:

> Fellow countrymen who refuse to be slaves without a motherland!
>
> Patriotic officers and men!
>
> Comrades of all parties and organizations ready to work for the sacred cause of resisting the Japanese invaders and saving the country!
>
> . . . .
>
> Brothers of all oppressed nationalities in China (Mongolian, Hui, Korean, Tibetan, Miao, Yao, Li, Fan. . . .)!
>
> Let us rise together to break all the fetters imposed on us by the Japanese invaders and the traitor Chiang Kai-shek! Let us boldly co-operate with the Chinese soviet government and local anti-Japanese governments in the northeast to organize an all-China united government for national defence! Let us boldly co-operate with the Red Army, the Northeastern People's Revolutionary Army and the various anti-Japanese volunteer forces to organize an all-China anti-Japanese allied army! . . .

At this point, Tao-ching raised her head to find that Chiang Hua and Liu Yi-feng had drawn close to her side and were reading too under their breath; their lips were moving, and their eyes glistening. Though unable to hear their voices, she was aware of their inward jubilation. Taking hold of Liu Yi-feng's hand, she exclaimed with unbounded delight:

"It's a wonderful statement, isn't it, mother?"

"Yes, it is. Once we've smashed the Japanese invaders, we shall be much nearer to our victory." With a radiant smile Liu Yi-feng reached out to grasp their hands. Seldom had she looked so excited, ardent and young.

The three of them gazed at the leaflet in silence for a moment. Then Chiang Hua said:

"That's why I'm so happy today — our Party's greater now than ever before. Since the Tsunyi Conference,* which established Chairman Mao as the leader of the revolution, great changes have been taking place in China. . . ." Just then they heard Old Jen shouting outside:

"Checking residence permits? Again? What's the use of this checking? There's a sick boy lying there dying."

At this critical juncture, Tao-ching and Chiang Hua quietly caught up the leaflets and hid them in a cupboard, while Liu Yi-feng calmly went over to the window. She saw Jen Yu-kuei's father at the doorway between the backyard and the front. He was fuming and shouting at some people in the front courtyard, obviously at the policemen who were making the check-up. It dawned upon the two women suddenly that the old man had a good heart and was quick-witted. He was repaying their care of his son not with profuse, humble thanks, but with help unobtrusively given in time of need. He obviously understood that his neighbours were not ordinary washerwomen.

Liu Yi-feng turned her head and signed to Chiang Hua to leave. He picked up a pile of neatly ironed clothes and walked out unhurriedly, while she found their residence certificate and went to meet the two black-coated policemen who were approaching.

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* The Tsunyi Conference in January 1935, corrected the erroneous, purely defensive line which had brought heavy losses to the Party, and established Mao Tsetung's correct leadership.

After the police had gone, Liu Yi-feng spoke severely, even harshly, to Tao-ching.

"Do you realize what you've done, Hsiu-lan? You've broken the rule of secrecy for workers in the White areas! It was very wrong of you to give us away so carelessly and recklessly. We're lucky that the old man has a good heart. Otherwise. . . ." Her face softened a little and after a pause she went on in low, grave tones, "You must know that our class, our Patry, requires an extremely high sense of organization and discipline. Examine yourself and see how far you've fallen short. . . ."

Tao-ching hung her head and was silent for a long time. Then raising eyes filled with bitter self-reproach, she said:

"Please believe me, mother! You've taught me a good lesson. I promise not to make the same mistake again."

The elder woman nodded. She thought for a minute or two before adding abruptly, "After a thorough investigation the Party has found that Tai Yu, whom you know, is a renegade and spy. . . . Don't you see now why we must never relax our vigilance?"

Tao-ching was utterly astounded. "Is he really a spy?" she asked half incredulously.

"There can be no doubt about it. Chiang Hua has been to great pains to investigate his case thoroughly, and the Party has collected so much information from various sources that there can't be any mistake."

Tao-ching stood there silenced, as if stunned, biting her lips indignantly.

That evening Jen Yu-kuei's father walked in without warning to blurt out this question:

"Please tell me honestly — are you Communists?"

The two women were taken by surprise and did not know how to answer.

"You can tell me the truth. I wouldn't give you away. I've something for you — I should have explained that first."

So saying, the old man produced from under his jacket a soiled white shirt on which there was a large bloodstain. His hands were trembling slightly.

"At last I've found someone to give it to! Here you are. The trouble I've had keeping it for two whole years!"

"What does this mean, uncle? Do explain!" urged Tao-ching in astonishment.

"Wait a bit. Let me see first if the coast is clear."

Two years previously, Old Jen had been a switchman at Chingfengtien Station. One dark, stormy autumn night he returned to his hut by the railway track at midnight after switching the points for a train. He was drying his clothes over the fire before turning in, when the door of his hut creaked and in reeled a young man covered with blood. The old man started at this sudden apparition. Who would venture out in a storm like this? Could it be a ghost? But the young stranger spoke before Old Jen could open his mouth.

"Save me, uncle! They're after me! . . ."

"Are you a robber?" asked the old man fearfully.

The lad shook his head and a smile appeared on his pale face.

"No!"

"What are you, then? Tell me the truth or I can't let you stay."

The young man, swaying from weakness, took him by the hand. His fingers were like ice.

"I'm a schoolmaster. We're not fighting for ourselves . . . I was caught by the Kuomintang and they want to send me to Peiping. So I ran away. . . . But I was hit."

The old man was suddenly struck by the stranger's resemblance both in speech and appearance to his elder son, Jen Yu-pin, who had also worked on the railway. After the February the Seventh Strike he was shot at Chengchow by order of the warlord Wu Pei-fu. He had joined the Communist Party in spite of his father's objections, and always insisted that the Communists were not fighting for themselves, that it was meaningless to live just for yourself. This stranger, now, who was saying the same thing, might be a Communist too. So the old man took him in, helped him off with his shirt which was sodden with blood and rain, and bandaged the bullet wound in his chest. But when he took off his coat, put it on the lad and urged him to stay there in hiding till the rain stopped, the stranger shook his head.

"I won't, thanks all the same, uncle! In these overalls of yours I should be able to slip away unnoticed. I've a lot to do yet. . . . What's your name? I shall never forget you!"

The young man pulled open the door as abruptly as he had entered, and walked, or rather crawled, out into the storm. The old man, bare-chested, saw him off, but before he went in again, the lad crawled back. His face was twisted with pain, and in the pelting rain his voice was almost inaudible.

"I'm badly wounded. I'm afraid they've done me in, uncle, but I don't want to die here to make trouble for you. Please keep that blood-stained shirt. I'm not a Communist, but if you have a chance, tell the Party I've shed my last drop of blood for the proletarian revolution. . . . I'm Chao Yu-ching of Poyeh in Hopei. . . ."

As the old man stood staring into the limitless darkness of the stormy night, tears streamed down his cheeks. His son, his dearly-loved elder son, had also kept thinking of the Party till the last. . . .

"Chao Yu-ching!" echoed Tao-ching in a voice choked with tears.

"If you are Communists, please take this shirt." Tears had sprung to the old man's red eyes. "I didn't want you to talk to my younger boy because. . . ." He threw Tao-ching a glance before going on. "Because my elder son died like Chao Yu-ching. I didn't want the younger to take the same road, but then I began to understand — I often sat outside and listened to you, till little by little I came to understand."

Liu Yi-feng gazed at the old man in silence, while Tao-ching sat on the bed in a daze, the blood-stained shirt in her hands. Watching her with surprise, the old man muttered, "Well, what's the matter now?" After staring blankly for a moment, he lowered his eyes and bent his head, stammering:

"Aunt Liu and Big Sister Chang, just one word more. If there's anything my boy or I can do, we'd give our lives for you. . . . I want to avenge my elder son and Chao Yu-ching. . . ."

Wiping her eyes, Tao-ching went up to him, longing to clasp his hand but too shy to do so. After a pause she smiled, deep affection in her large eyes.

"Uncle, to think I didn't know till today what a good man you are!"

"Well, I didn't really understand you both till today either." He smiled and for the first time they saw a look of deep joy on his wrinkled face.

Chapter 27

In her small, rather ill-lit kitchen, Hsiao-yen's mother was busy at the large stove preparing the evening meal. The lines on her finely chiselled face stood out distinctly in the glow of the fire but they did not conceal the pleasure in her heart. She was cooking a dish of sliced pork, and the shredded red chili and garlic she tossed into the pan filled the air with a pungent fragrance. At that moment, as if recollecting something important, she called over her shoulder to the maid who was washing vegetables at the sink:

"Sister Chen, do you know who's come to dinner this evening?"

"No," answered the maid, whose broad smile belied her words.

"Hsiao-yen's growing up. She'll be getting married soon. Your master and I have asked her young man to dine with us this evening. Professors Fan and Wu are coming too. What do you think of the young gentleman, Sister Chen? . . . He's very steady and quite a scholar too."

"A fine young gentleman," chimed in the maid. "I could see at once that he's a good man. . . . It's high time Miss Hsiao-yen married. She's twenty-three, isn't she? A girl in the country usually gets married at fifteen or sixteen and has a child several years old by the time she's Miss Hsiao-yen's age."

"Well, it's different for girl students in the city. Hsiao-yen has such high ideals, I can't help worrying about her future sometimes, not that it worries her. This is the first young man she's been interested in. . . ." While deftly preparing the dishes, Mrs. Wang confided cheerfully to the maid what had been on her mind for some time. "She finishes at the university next year and she says she won't marry Mr. Cheng till after she's graduated. You can see they're very much in love, can't you?"

Sister Chen was a shrewd, middle-aged woman from the country. With a glance at Mrs. Wang's beaming face, she smiled knowingly again and assured her coolly, "You'll soon have a grandson to hold in your arms, ma'am. Grandchildren mean a lot to old women in the country. When a baby's going to be born, it's the grandmother on the mother's side who gets everything ready: brown sugar, eggs, bibs, quilts, all the baby clothes. . . . That's why poor folk don't like to have daughters. Sons are a help to the family, but you lose money on daughters. . . ." At this point, remembering suddenly that her mistress had three daughters and no son, she quickly changed her tune. "That's how it is in the country, ma'am. Of course it's quite different for young ladies in the cities. Miss Hsiao-yen is so clever and capable, she'll support you in your old age just like a son."

Mrs. Wang had her head on one side as if listening, but she had not really heard what the maid had been saying, for her thoughts were in the sitting-room where her husband and daughters were entertaining the guests. Enjoying themselves at the table there sat their prospective son-in-law Cheng Chun-tsai, Hsiao-yen, their friends Professors Fan and Wu, and Hsiao-yen's aunt Wang Yen-wen. White gauzy curtains hung at the large, bright windows of the cool, neat room where all was quiet comfort.

They were drinking in a leisurely manner while the maid brought in one excellent dish after another cooked by the hostess herself. Thin, pale Professor Fan occupied the seat of honour between Professor Wang and Professor Wu, a short fat man with a head like a large watermelon. Wang Yen-wen sat by her brother, Hsiao-yen and Tai Yu opposite Professor Fan.

"May I ask where you are studying, Mr. Cheng?" inquired Profesor Wu with a smile, putting down his cup and wiping the perspiration on the shiny crown of his head.

Tai Yu was spruce in a suit of dark blue serge. His hair, usually stiff and unkempt, had been sleeked down with pomade. Fixing his goggle eyes upon Professor Wu, he was about to reply when Hsiao-yen stealthily tugged at his coat and with a sidelong glance at her he answered:

"At Tsinghua, Professor Wu."

"Tsinghua? . . . Very good! That's an excellent university, isn't it?" Professor Wu made a thumbs-up sign to Hsiao-yen as an indication of approval, and laughed. He was as frank and outspoken as his host, but more humorous and loquacious. After taking a mouthful of chicken fried with red chili, he exclaimed, "What a marvellous cook your wife is, Hung-pin! No matter how simple her materials — even ordinary turnips or bean-curd — she turns out delicious dishes with a distinctive flavour, a distinctive flavour. . . ." Nodding at Professor Fan, he continued, "You don't come here very often, Old Fan, but I've taken to dropping in at least twice a week — always at dinner time, mind you. So I've met Mr. Cheng before." Realizing that he had unwittingly digressed very far from the subject of the young man's university, he struck the table lightly and said, blinking:

"Can you tell me, Mr. Cheng, who's on the editorial board of your *Tsinghua Weekly*? It's absolutely first-rate!" Without waiting for an answer, he made another thumbs-up sign and went on, "Have you read it, Old Fan? You, Old Wang? Lately, I have taken to reading each number as it comes out. Though it's a student publication, its articles and arguments are as good as in top-notch magazines with a national reputation. In my opinion, some of the articles are even better than those in *Life of Reading*. . . . 'A man with a grievance must vent it.' As things are nowadays, it's not strange that students should shout about revolution and national salvation. I'm getting old and useless myself, but I can't help feeling deeply concerned about what's to become of our country. . . ." He shook his head again and again, his small eyes gleamed with anxiety, and he wound up by taking another sip of wine.

At this point, Mrs. Wang, who had taken off her apron and was wearing a grey woollen gown, came quietly in. Professor Wu was the first to stand up and greet her, saying, "Thank you for your wonderful dinner, Mrs. Wang! I was just saying, whatever ingredients you use, your cooking gives the dish a distinctive flavour. The enjoyment of good food and wine is certainly one of the pleasures of life! . . . Well, do sit down and join us."

Hsiao-yen brought a chair and Mrs. Wang sat down. With a kindly glance at them all she said with a smile:

"This is just a simple meal, please help yourselves." Looking affectionately at Tai Yu, she whispered to him, "Aren't you hungry? Don't be shy!" The young man gave an embarrassed nod and smiled.

"Thank you! You must be tired."

"Not a bit of it!" She patted him lightly on the shoulder, and with her eyes upon her daughter added with a chuckle, "Hsiao-yen is no cook. Shall I come and cook for you both sometimes? You see, Professor Wu is always paying me compliments on my cooking!"

"My dear, have some wine!" Taking advantage of the lull in his colleague's loquacity, Professor Wang raised a cup and presented it to his wife. "You've been to great pains to prepare this dinner for Chun-tsai, Old Fan, Yen-wen and our

talkative friend Old Wu. We must drink to your health!"

Mrs. Wang took the cup of wine and sipped it. Immediately Professor Wu came over to her, raised his cup and proposed the toast, "Mrs. Wang, to your health! To the happiness of our host and hostess, and of Mr. Cheng and Hsiao-yen. . . . Now, Hsiao-yen, to your health!"

Hsiao-yen looked as bashful as a bride. Her mother had insisted on her asking Chun-tsai to dinner with these professors. She would not force them to go through a formal betrothal, but she did want to make their engagement known in a suitable manner to their relatives and best friends. She had started making preparations a week beforehand, buying a smart yet quiet lined gown of dark green silk for her daughter as well as a jersey and overcoat for the young man. When her father's friends came to the house, Hsiao-yen usually enjoyed talking and exchanging opinions with them. To her, this was a means of carrying out propaganda among intellectuals. Today, dressed in her new gown, she was sitting there as shyly as a bride, for though her mother had not actually announced her engagement, the drift of the talk, the knowing look in her aunt's eyes and the teasing remarks made by her sharp young sisters, all made the matter clear.

"Brother-in-law! Brother-in-law!" cried Ling-yen playfully as she stood behind her elder sister and pointed at Tai Yu. "Sister! Sister! Brother-in-law! . . ."

Hsiao-yen blushed. She tried to avoid the admiration in her aunt's faded eyes and the affectionate glances of her lover. After a moment's embarrassment, she stood up and gave a generous helping of food to Professor Fan, who had said nothing all this time.

"Try this, Uncle Fan," she urged. "Why are you so quiet today?"

"Yes, Old Fan, what's the matter? Anything wrong?" echoed Professor Wang.

Professor Fan, over sixty years old, had a grizzled moustache and was wearing an old gown of dark brown silk spotted with grease stains. His movements were slow and apathetic, and he paused before looking up listlessly to ask:

"Hung-pin, Old Wu, how much in arrears are your salaries at the national universities?"

"Oh, why bring that up! Any mention of that. . . ." Professor Wu was off again before his host could answer. His big, shiny head wagged as he spoke. "Centuries of experience should have taught us that officials get rich while teachers always remain poor. Things have gone from bad to worse since the establishment of the republic. . . . How often have we campaigned to demand payment? Let me see, one year, two, three . . . Hsiao-yen, help me to count! Humph! Since 1917, or the sixth year of the republic when I began to teach, I have taken part in no less than forty-eight campaigns, no, more than fifty within eighteen years. . . . They say university professors are pillars of the state and get a total of two or three hundred yuan a month, counting their salaries and subsidies. It sounds fine, but all we actually get is empty promises. Sometimes we're not paid for as much as six months on end. . . . Well, you may get a man to work for nothing but you can't get your stomach to work for nothing. It can't go without food for even a single day. So you have to go to the pawnshop or turn to relatives and friends for help. Often you don't know where your next meal's to come from. Yet convention requires professors to keep up appearances. It's awkward when you have to dismiss your private ricksha-man or your maid. You go out with an impressive brief-case under your arm as if you were rich and important, when in fact all that brief-case contains is a few dingy sheets of lecture notes. You haven't another suit besides the old one you're wearing. It's a farce. . . ." He laughed. "Still I've managed to keep body and soul together all these years. Are you hard up again, Old Fan? It's no use worrying. I advise you to be a bit more realistic!" He paused at last to mop the great drops of perspiration on his forehead, and was on the point of resuming when his host chipped in:

"Splendid! Old Wu has painted a truthful picture of the life of professors." With a laugh he changed the subject. "In the past I always found it hard to account for such a deplorable state of affairs. I used to think that government by good men would set everything right. But now . . . now. . . ." He laid down his chopsticks, lit a cigarette and sat back to nod smilingly at Hsiao-yen and Tai Yu. "We'd better give the young people a chance. Chun-tsai and Hsiao-yen are more logical and far-sighted than our generation when it comes to analysing such problems. Chun-tsai, would you mind telling us how things are going to develop? The situation in North China is growing more tense every day. Japanese planes are flying over Peiping day and night. People are beginning to panic. . . ."

All of a sudden the harsh drone of a plane rent the silence of the clear sky, abruptly cutting short Professor Wang's remarks.

"Speak of the devil!" Professor Wu sprang up with boyish curiosity and rushed into the courtyard. He was followed by Hsiao-yen, Tai Yu and Professor Wang.

A plane was flying low over the roofs and tree-tops, circling slowly round as if there were not a soul in the city. The Japanese emblem — a bright red sun — on its wings seemed to be staring down on the unhappy land. Professor Wu craned his neck for a better view. Professor Wang turned away after one look, while Hsiao-yen whispered to Tai Yu in distress:

"Don't watch it. Come back in!"

They went back indoors in a wretched state of mind.

Professor Fan and Wang Yen-wen had remained at the table to talk, while Mrs. Wang and the maid were clearing up.

Once inside, Professor Wu started talking away again. When he was not there, Professor Wang would talk and laugh cheerfully, airing his views freely, but the presence of Professor Wu, who held forth non-stop, inevitably cramped his style. As for the others, they had even less chance to get a word in.

"Who ever heard of such a thing!" Wagging his melon-shaped head and rapping the table, Professor Wu exclaimed indignantly, "My friends, this country is going to the dogs! . . .

If I were in my twenties now, I'd join up at once in order to avenge the nation!"

"That's all hot air, Old Wu!" interposed Professor Fan, whose short moustache was bristling with annoyance. "You're like a youngster shouting at everything that happens. Why did you only give one yuan to support the Peking University demonstrators who went to Nanking? For shame, Mr. Wu! Nothing annoys me more than empty talk. . . . Remember the words of Confucius: 'At forty, I ceased to waver; at fifty, I knew the will of Heaven.' We have all turned fifty — why carry on like a child?"

For a moment Professor Wu was abashed and flushed, but he was laughing again the next second.

"But there's a difference between Confucius and me. I wasn't born a sage. How could I know in advance all that would happen? . . . Well, Old Fan, you're so obstinate, I shan't argue with you. But see what has happened to Hung-pin. Once he set Hu Shih on a pedestal, but today he abhors his pragmatism, his call to save the country by studying, his subservience to the imperialists. . . . So why shouldn't I have come to my senses too? My dear fellow, we intellectuals are more prone to talk than to act, but it seems to me you don't even know how to talk!"

While the two elderly professors were disputing, Hsiao-yen pulled Tai Yu's sleeve and whispered:

"Why don't you say something? We ought to join in."

His eyes on Professor Wu, Tai Yu shook his head.

"It's not worth our while, Hsiao-yen. I must be going. I'll come back later. Please wait for me; I've something to tell you."

"I must say you're behaving very oddly!" Looking at Professor Wu out of the corner of her eye, Hsiao-yen continued softly, "He's not such a bad sort. Why run away? . . ."

Without any reply, Tai Yu made his farewells and left. Thereupon Wang Yen-wen, seated by the table, took her niece's hand and began to speak to her slowly. From her manner it

was hard to tell whether she was pleased or worried.

"Hsiao-yen, I am glad you have found your life companion. . . . He seems a pleasant young man, but something about him rather frightens me. . . . Tell me, is he another dangerous character? And what has made you grow so like Lin Tao-ching? Your father has changed too. It really rather frightens me. I think I'll go back to Tinghsien in a day or two. I don't feel at my ease here."

"Don't worry, aunty!" Hsiao-yen gazed affectionately at the elder woman's pallid face. "We know what we're doing. . . . I've been wanting to ask you for some time if you're still angry with Lin Tao-ching? You mustn't hate her, she's a fine person." Her innocent, gentle eyes seemed to be pleading for forgiveness.

"Yes, God tells us to forgive our enemies." Wang Yen-wen's low voice barely disguised her distress and bitter resentment.

"No, aunty, I didn't mean that sort of forgiveness!"

Upon this, Hsiao-yen abruptly left her aunt and went to her own room.

Later that evening Tai Yu came back to have a long talk with Hsiao-yen in her room.

"Chun-tsai, I wonder what mother meant by making such a fuss today. . . ." A faint blush spread over Hsiao-yen's fair-complexioned face. "I hate meaningless conventions now just as much as Tao-ching once did."

"What's that about Tao-ching?" asked Tai Yu.

"I shan't tell you!" Hsiao-yen shook her head with a smile. "Have you any news of her? It's almost two months since she left, but I haven't seen her once. I keep worrying about her and miss her very much."

After leaving Hsiao-yen's home to work with Liu Yi-feng, Tao-ching, because of the nature of her work and the intimacy between Hsiao-yen and Tai Yu, had not gone back to see her friend, who thought about her constantly.

Tai Yu took Hsiao-yen's hand and stroked it tenderly, an inscrutable gleam in his bulging eyes as he said hoarsely:

"Hsiao-yen, I often feel you care more about Lin Tao-ching than about me. You're too naive, you silly girl! She's probably forgotten you!"

"Forgotten me, Chun-tsai?" Hsiao-yen smiled. "Not she! . . . She's busy, or she may have fallen ill."

A cunning smile dawned on Tai Yu's glum, pasty face. As Hsiao-yen had brushed his insinuation aside, he lit a cigarette and continued slowly:

"Isn't it true that you've been making inquiries about her for some time and learned nothing at all? Well, I got some reliable information from a certain comrade yesterday. The fact is — I'm afraid the truth will startle you and you'll find it hard to believe. . . . No, I really can't tell you."

"What? What do you mean?" asked Hsiao-yen breathlessly, her face flushed. "Do be more explicit, Chun-tsai! Tell me what's happened?"

Tai Yu took her in his arms and kissed her before saying in a low voice, as if to spare her feelings:

"Hsiao-yen, my dear comrade, you must believe me. Lin Tao-ching is a shameless renegade — she deceived you. . . ."

"Impossible! How can you believe such nonsense?" she asked in a pained voice, staring blankly at him.

"Believe it or not as you like. But I was formally notified of this by the city committee." Tai Yu puffed grumpily at his cigarette. "Don't you remember, while staying here, she openly declared she'd lost interest in the revolution?"

Hsiao-yen was stunned. Presently she began to cry, leaning over the table and sobbing as bitterly as if her friend had died.

"No, Chun-tsai! I refuse to believe it!" After a bout of weeping she looked up and impatiently pulled off her spectacles to dry her tears. She shook her head vehemently. "You've got hold of some made-up story, I'm sure! A girl like Tao-ching would never do such a thing. Never! You're talking rubbish! Rubbish!"

Tai Yu was taken aback by the violence of her reaction. His

bloated, waxy face darkened and his lustreless eyes clouded over.

"Come now, Hsiao-yen, calm down! Steady on!" Stroking her shoulder, he proceeded to spin a web of vicious lies to enmesh the innocent girl. "Hsiao-yen, my darling, is anybody else in the world dearer to either of us than we are to each other? I love you with all my heart. Lin Tao-ching was your best friend. How could I slander her or do her harm? The truth is, you have too little experience of revolutionary work and too little knowledge of revolutionary theory. You don't realize that even high-ranking, leading members of the Party often turn renegade when tortured, threatened or bribed by the enemy. It's quite natural that Lin Tao-ching, who comes from a landlord family, should have betrayed the Party under enemy pressure."

"Didn't you come from a big landlord family too?" retorted Hsiao-yen, widening her tear-stained eyes resentfully. In her agony she could not help flaring up. It seemed as if he had destroyed her dearest friend.

Tai Yu solicitously helped her to the bed and made her lie down. After gazing for an instant at her closed eyes and pale face, he struck a new note. Leaning over the bed he said gently in a contrite voice:

"My kind-hearted darling, forgive me! Maybe the news is false. . . . At any rate, we didn't join the revolution because of her. . . . I'm one of the leading Party members in Peiping. If you lose Lin Tao-ching, that surely doesn't mean that you'll leave the revolutionary ranks, does it?"

"Oh, Chun-tsai!" Hsiao-yen seized his arm and broke down again. "I'll forget her! I'll forget her, the hateful traitor! But you, Chun-tsai, you — we must never follow her example!"

Tai Yu turned as white as a sheet. All that was base and vicious in his nature seemed to writhe before Hsiao-yen's innocence and integrity. He pulled furiously at his cigarette while cold sweat from his forehead dripped on to her soft black hair.

Chapter 28

One evening late in autumn, when the buzz of voices in the streets was dying down, a black car with its head-lights dimmed drove swiftly through the northeast section of Peiping. The driver was a sturdy young fellow with a peaked cap pulled well forward. The two men in the back, both of them about thirty, were dressed like minor government functionaries. One was Chiang Hua, whose calm, intelligent face contrasted strongly with Tai Yu's tense expression as he sat there trying to appear self-possessed. His protruding eyes were fixed vacantly on Chiang Hua, his only recent Party contact, who usually met him at a specified tram stop and would stroll down the road with him talking for a while before suddenly making off. Since Tai Yu hoped, through Chiang Hua, to win the confidence of the Party, he had not had him arrested. In front of him, he always pretended to be loyal and progressive, eager to do more work for the revolution.

Today, contrary to custom, Chiang Hua had offered Tai Yu a lift in his car. At first Tai Yu rejoiced to think that he had regained the confidence of the Party and was about to receive an important assignment. But after he boarded the car and it drove swiftly off, he became pale with fear.

"Today I am here to examine your case on behalf of the Party, you dirty renegade!" Chiang Hua's voice was low and earnest, but clear and strong. In the dim interior of the car, his eyes sparkled. "Come clean, now!" he demanded. "What dirty work have you done for the enemy since you sold out? Let's have it all!"

"I don't understand — there's been some mistake. . . ."

Tai Yu wanted to protest loudly against such charges but his tongue failed him. He peered fearfully through the curtain over the window, subconsciously preparing for the worst.

"You understand all right!" When Chiang Hua saw Tai Yu's furtive glances out of the window, he put his hands slowly on his knees and smiled. "Don't worry. We're not going to kill you. I just want to tell you: the Party has decided to expel you for good! Never again, from now on, can you disgrace the glorious name of Communist!"

"Expel me?" The muscles on Tai Yu's face were twitching. The car speeding through the twilight gave a lurch, and he collapsed against the window to wail, "Expel me? I joined the Party in 1925, since then I've done a lot of work for it. . . . You can't expel me!" He wept convulsively, as if pierced to the heart by such injustice.

Chiang Hua leaned back against the upholstered seat and blinked contemptuously before he said coldly, "You refuse to confess, then? All right, I shall tell you the charges against you." He took a paper from his pocket, but it was too dark in the car to read what was on it. Holding the indictment in his hand, he said sternly, "After your arrest in 1933, you turned renegade. Then you wormed your way back into the Party to do your bloody work for the enemy. . . . Take this! All your crimes are written here!" He tossed the paper to Tai Yu and continued, "And let me tell you that you've not only been expelled from the Party, but the Chinese people have passed sentence of death upon you for your crimes!"

"Death!" repeated Tai Yu mechanically and trembled violently as he stared at Chiang Hua.

"Yes, sentence of death," said Chiang Hua solemnly. "The Chinese people have passed your death sentence but we are not going to execute it yet. If you turn over a new leaf and give up your counter-revolutionary activities, you may be pardoned, but if you dare carry on with your crimes, you will really lose your head when the people have won victory. . . . Get out now!" The car slowed down where the road was broad but deserted. As it turned a corner Chiang Hua opened the door and gave Tai Yu a hard shove. The renegade sprawled with a heavy thud on to the road, while the car sped on and was out of sight in no time.

Lying on the cold, hard road, Tai Yu fainted away with fright and the shock of the fall. In a short time, however, he came to. There were few passers-by and no one had seen him. He staggered to his feet and looked round in bewilderment, trying to make out where he was. After a while he got his bearings again.

"Confounded Bolsheviks!" he swore as he felt a pain in his back and smiled self-mockingly. "The death sentence!" His bulging eyes gleamed with despair like those of a cornered beast. "When the people have won victory. . . . My fine Bolshevik comrades, you've miscalculated!"

That evening he did not seek out his mistress. As a matter of fact, he did not dare go to her every day unless she summoned him. He returned to his spacious room in a high-class hotel and having put on the light made haste to examine the paper Chiang Hua had given him.

The indictment read:

> Tai Yu, alias Li Tien-min, now known as Cheng Chuntsai. Aged thirty, a native of Ningpo, Chekiang. Comes from a big landlord family, studied at Aurora University in Shanghai. Admitted to the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai in 1925. After the failure of the Great Revolution in 1927 escaped to Peiping and lost contact with the Party. Reestablished contact shortly afterwards and was successively district committee member of the Tientsin Anti-Imperialist League, director of the propaganda department of the Socialist League and secretary of the east city district committee of the Communist Party in Peiping. Arrested in June 1933, turned renegade, was shortly released and sneaked back into the Party to carry out disruptive activities. . . .

He felt dizzy and lacked the courage to read on. These clearly itemized charges were like a mirror held up to his ugly face. With a choking sensation he closed his eyes and fought for breath in heavy gasps, until he could nerve himself to continue reading. Nearly all his early crimes were listed, but no mention was made of his sabotage in Tinghsien, his relations with Wang Hsiao-yen or his recent activities in Peiping. This puzzled him for a while, then a smile spread over his waxen face as he thought, "No need to worry. They can't discover everything that happens." He got up, drank a cup of strong

tea and felt like a new man. Glancing at the indictment he had tossed on his bed, he sneered, "Pride comes before a fall, my Bolshevik comrades!"

He threw himself down upon the opulent bed which reeked of tobacco, and closed his eyes to reflect. From his blackened lips issued smoke as he puffed expensive cigarettes.

Dealing with Tai Yu's treachery to the Party had been a tricky business. The Peiping City Committee and Hopei Provincial Committee had thoroughly sifted Chiang Hua's information and the evidence given by others, and finally all the charges were proved. What made the problem so important was the fact that he was no ordinary renegade but one who had wormed his way back into the Party, had access to inside information and had carried out quite a number of acts of sabotage against true revolutionaries. After his release by the Kuomintang he had hoped the Party would keep him in Peiping so that he could spy on leading members of the Hopei Provincial Committee and Peiping City Committee. However, he had been sent to Paoting instead, where his first attempt at sabotage was unsuccessful; for just as he was planning to find out the whereabouts of its leading personnel, the Paoting Special Committee transferred him to Tinghsien. There, learning of the intended uprising of the local security corps, he had betrayed all those taking part and was responsible for Li Yung-kuang's death and the destruction of part of the Party organization in Tinghsien. But this last action exposed him and aroused the suspicions of Chiang Hua, who lost no time in reporting the matter to the Paoting Special Committee and Peiping City Committee. From that time on the Party kept a strict watch on him and investigated all his activities. Finally the renegade's true character was revealed.

The exposure of Tai Yu posed a number of questions that had to be resolved. Most serious, the Party estimated, was the likelihood that he might attack even more recklessly in the future; moreover the enemy might use his long experience of working in the Party to disrupt the revolutionary cause in various ways or to deceive innocent young people. According to information recently received by the Peiping City Committee, he was organizing secret activities in some universities in the name of the Communist Party. He might use his hold on Wang Hsiao-yen for an assault on Peking University. Accordingly, the City Committee took various counter-measures in the universities and units concerned. To mention only two of these measures, Chiang Hua was instructed to inform Tai Yu of his expulsion from the Party and give him a stern warning. This had been done in the car. The second measure was to send Lin Tao-ching to Peking University to work. One reason for sending her was to strengthen the Party's work there, unite the students and intensify the campaign to resist Japan and save China, another was to win Wang Hsiao-yen away from Tai Yu and help her to see his real character so that no more students would be deceived. Of course, both reasons were closely related. No mention had been made of Tao-ching or of Tai Yu's recent activities in the indictment handed to him, as the Party wanted to allay the spy's suspicions and put him off his guard.

Chapter 29

Early in October Tao-ching left Liu Yi-feng and, under the name of Lu Fang went to strengthen the Party work in Peking University. The first thing she did was to call on Hou Jui, leader of the Party branch there.

Hou Jui, a thin youth of twenty-four, was a fourth-year history student, a classmate of Wang Hsiao-yen. With a letter of introduction from the Party, Tao-ching presented herself one afternoon as a fellow provincial. Hou Jui had a small room to himself on the first floor of the Grey Building. There was no formality when they met, and as soon as the door was shut they got down to business.

"I'm so glad you've come!" Hou Jui, whose eyes were set far apart, always smiled when he talked. "The strength of the Party has been badly weakened here in the last two years by continuous arrests and suppression. We still haven't recovered from our losses."

"How did you and Hsu Hui manage to stay here? You must give me some advice."

Hou Jui smiled and looked out of the window before turning back to whisper, "We put on protective colouring. To most students I'm just a dull, hard-working, well-behaved bookworm. I hardly ever betray what I really think unless I am quite certain about the person to whom I'm talking. Hsu Hui did an even better job. At one time she managed to mix freely with the backward students and even with the die-hards. That of course made her seem innocuous to the enemy!"

"But. . . ." Tao-ching bit back the question on the tip of her tongue: "If you curl up like a snail inside your shell, how can you make any headway?" Instead she asked about Wang Hsiao-yen.

Hou Jui said with another smile, "We've a long history of Trotskyism here. The first clique, called the 'Motive Force' group, joined forces with Tao Hsi-sheng's* 'New Life' group. They pretend to be progressive to fool young, naive students and do all they can to disrupt unity. Working hand in glove with students of the C.C. clique of the Kuomintang, they spy on other students and inform against them for the sake of cash rewards. That's how it is." He hesitated as if he had forgotten something, and with another smile at Tao-ching went on, "You were asking about Wang Hsiao-yen. She's definitely no good now. She's thick with these Trotskyites who are led by Wang Chung, a third-year history student." He proceeded to give her a picture of general conditions there.

Her eyes on Hou Jui's thin, smiling face, Tao-ching was silent for a while. She was distressed to hear this news about her friend, and wondered what ought to be done. Presently, as if to shake off her depression, she rose from her chair and said:

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* A Kuomintang politician who went over to the Japanese imperialists at the beginning of the War of Resistance and later became Chiang Kai-shek's vice-minister of information.

"Comrade Hou Jui, let's discuss how to tackle our work here. The district committee says we mustn't let this university, which has such a glorious tradition, go downhill. Other universities and colleges in Peiping have been roused to action by the critical developments in North China. We haven't been able to get control of the student association here, and so we've no means to guide the mass struggle. Shouldn't we first mobilize the progressives to seize control of the student association?"

Hou Jui smiled and said in reply, "That's what we've been trying to do for quite a time. But . . . but we've been so hard hit here that it's difficult. . . ."

Tao-ching did not press the matter. After telling him her intention of calling on Hsiao-yen, she left.

She decided to set to work immediately. First she must find Hsiao-yen to expose Tai Yu to her and urge her to break with him. She must also settle down in Peking University, attend lectures and take part in some student activities. Because the university had a tradition of "freedom", at least as far as outward appearances went, students could attend lectures, select courses of study and come and go much as they pleased. As a result, many outsiders came to lectures without being detected by the professors, while even the students themselves did not always know which were *bona-fide* members of the university.

As soon as Tao-ching had found a room in a private house near the university, she went to call on Hsiao-yen. She had not seen her friend since she left to work with Liu Yi-feng. Although Hsiao-yen's intimacy with Tai-Yu disturbed her, their long-standing friendship and her confidence in Hsiao-yen made her deeply concerned for her and anxious to see her. She mounted the steps to Hsiao-yen's room in warm expectation of a pleasant talk which should stimulate them both and reinforce their friendship, but things did not turn out at all as expected. As soon as she saw Hsiao-yen she knew that something was very wrong.

Hsiao-yen was busy writing at her desk. When Tao-ching came in she looked up as if she were seeing a ghost and blushed crimson. Then, averting her eyes, she said coldly as if to a stranger:

"So it's you. What do you want?"

Suppressing her surprise and resentment, Tao-ching quietly went up to her and took her hand.

"What's the matter, Hsiao-yen? I haven't seen you for more than three months — how I've missed you!" To her astonishment, Hsiao-yen withdrew her hand and turned her head away. Tao-ching paled with anger and asked in a voice that trembled, "Tell me, Wang Hsiao-yen, in what way have I offended you?"

Hsiao-yen just went on writing and made no answer. Tao-ching stood uncertainly in the oppressive silence.

"This won't do!" she thought. "I must clear this up." She asked her friend:

"Hsiao-yen, has someone been turning you against me? What's behind this? Why have you changed?"

When Hsiao-yen raised her head slowly to look her in the face, Tao-ching saw from the wretchedness in her round black eyes that she was caught in a web of suffering and fear. Big tears started rolling down her cheeks, and she leaned against the desk covering her eyes as she wept.

Tao-ching watched in dismay. This unexpected turn of events and Hsiao-yen's refusal to say just what she suspected made her uncertain whether to go or stay.

"Hsiao-yen," she ventured, "don't you trust me any more? Is that it? . . ." On her guard now, she kept a keen watch on the other girl who still maintained a stubborn silence. "I'm going now. We'll have other chances to talk. I'm going to attend some lectures at Peking University to make up for studying so little in the past. We shall be seeing a lot of each other."

Still Hsiao-yen said nothing, and just raised her head to watch Tao-ching as if she were afraid that she might steal something on her way out.

One afternoon two days later, after attending two lectures on ancient history, Tao-ching met Hsiao-yen coming towards her, outside the Red Bulding. Hsiao-yen seemed anxious to avoid her, but Tao-ching went up to her.

"Are you going to a lecture?" Tao-ching smiled as if nothing were wrong. "Is Uncle Wang well? And your mother and the girls?"

Hsiao-yen could not avoid making a cold response which revealed her inner conflict.

"They're all well, thanks," she muttered. "Have you been to a lecture?"

Tao-ching seized this chance to take her hand and say:

"Hsiao-yen, I know there's something worrying you, but I shan't force you to tell me what it is." After a slight pause she added, "I'm upset to see you've changed recently. . . . If you still trust me, I advise you to think things over carefully." She looked round, then saw both fear and distrust in Hsiao-yen's eyes and said no more.

Her friend stared back at her, opened her mouth as if to speak, thought better of it and hurried away.

Hsiao-yen's unexpected change of heart upset Tao-ching's plan and created new difficulties. She felt sure Tai Yu had deceived her friend and come between them. In that case, what had the renegade told her and how had he come to have such an ascendancy over her? She knew that Hsiao-yen enjoyed a certain prestige among the students and was occupying a fairly important position in the student association. Tao-ching thought that if she did not win her over, she might be utilized by the enemy. The thought of this made Tao-ching's heart very heavy. Late that night she walked back and forth in the quiet room she had rented, unable to sleep.

Two days later, after a lecture on the first floor of the Red Building, Tao-ching was coming downstairs with many other students when two young men rushed up to her on the landing. One seized her arms while the other, a youth with a thin, monkey-like face, began slapping her hard on both cheeks. This done, he cried out, brandishing his fist:

"Renegade! Spy! Shameless bitch! How dare you come to lectures here? Get out!"

As soon as Monkey-face left off, the other shook his fist and swore:

"Next time you sneak in pretending to be a student, we'll give you a good beating and throw you out!"

Tao-ching resisted angrily, striking out at the fellow who had struck her, but four rough hands caught her off guard and shoved her away so that she rolled down the stone stairs. Two other students were helping her struggle to her feet when she saw the pale face of Hsiao-yen, who was standing in the middle of a group on the landing, looking on as if this were an acrobatic performance. Sniggering and talking with her was Monkey-face.

Tao-ching felt a wave of dizziness more painful than being slapped on the face. Wang Hsiao-yen, the best friend she had ever had, was the only person here who knew her. In that case, was Hsiao-yen her betrayer? Had she been betrayed by her best friend? Forced to this fearful conclusion, she glared at Hsiao-yen furiously, her hands smeared with blood from her mouth.

That evening Tao-ching and the three other Party members at Peking University—Hou Jui, Wu Yu-ping and Liu Li—held an emergency meeting in a neat, plainly furnished room at Liu Li's home. Twenty-two-year-old Liu Li, a short, intelligent student majoring in English, looked hardly more than eighteen. Enraged by the assault on Tao-ching, they met in an atmosphere of tense indignation.

Tao-ching was the first to speak.

"According to the leadership and my understanding of the position here, our most urgent task now is to rouse. . . ." The surgeon's mask she had put on to hide her swollen face made talking difficult and she pulled it off before resuming, "We must encourage the students who took an active part in the Save-China Movement and who have some political awareness. They must be aroused to become the nucleus of the progressive forces which will rally all the middle-of-the-roaders. We have so few Party members here that unless we rouse the progressive students to action, we can't break down the terrible apathy prevailing in the university."

Liu Li followed up, saying, "Comrade Lu Fang is quite right. We mustn't just be Party members in name, marking time because there are difficulties before us. Ever since Hsu Hui's transfer, the few of us who were left have been too conservative, afraid of exposing ourselves or of being arrested. Look at what's going on in Tsinghua and Yenching." She raised her hand and glanced sternly at Hou Jui. "They're going ahead with all sorts of activities in the Save-China Movement. Beyond doubt this is due to the work of the Party members there, and to the fighting spirit of their Party organizations. I think we should follow suit." Her forceful contribution, sharp and to the point, seemed out of keeping with her girlish appearance.

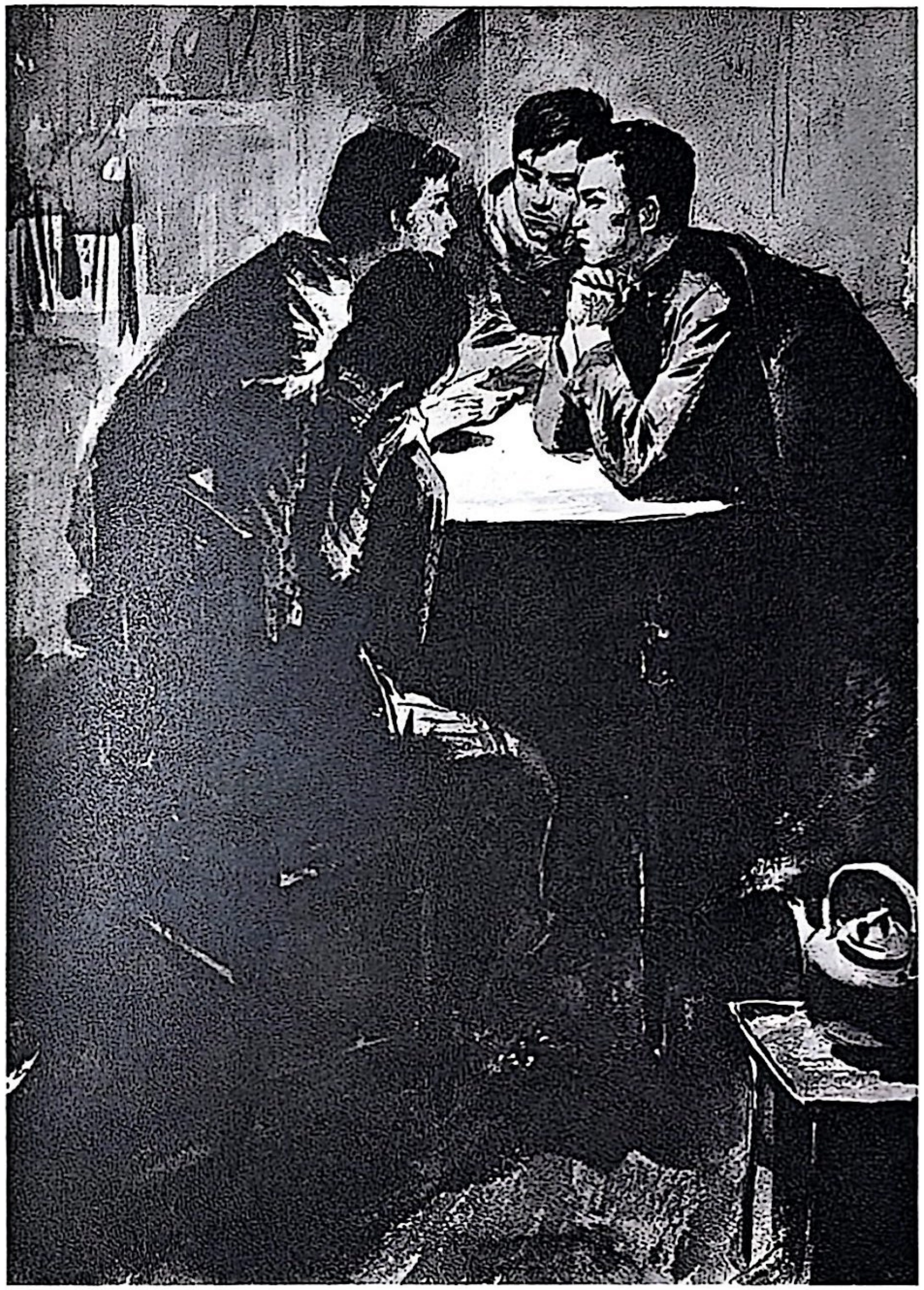
"It's not as simple as that." Wu Yu-ping, another student of about twenty-two, spoke slowly and gloomily, glancing from Tao-ching and Hou Jui to Liu Li. "Conditions vary in different schools; it's no use making sweeping generalizations. Last year the Socialist League here was seriously weakened by a heavy attack. It's true that plenty of students are patriotic, but I don't think the time is ripe yet to rouse them to immediate action. . . ."

"Not ripe yet!" burst out Liu Li vehemently. Hou Jui signalled to her to calm down, and said unhurriedly with his usual smile:

"Little Liu, the situation is rather complex. What good will impatience do? In 1934, the darkest year for the whole country as well as for Peiping, cliques of all sorts swarmed on to the political stage. Here in Peking University alone we have the C.C. clique, the Trotskyites, the *étatistes* and the anarchists. We shall drive them out, I'm sure of that. But. . . ."

"But what?" Tao-ching who was watching him intently could not help cutting in.

"But getting impatient doesn't help," replied Hou Jui with a gentle smile. "The Party has suffered heavy losses here and



we must hold on to what's left of our strength because it's an asset to the revolution."

Before Tao-ching could open her mouth, Liu Li made another gesture as if to brush some obstacle aside. Then she said in a lowered voice:

"Old Hou, according to you we should sit back and do nothing. I've been waiting all this time, and so have many other students, but you want us to go on waiting. For how long? Do you expect the counter-revolution to quit the political scene of its own accord?"

Hou Jui's thin, sallow face flushed. With a quick glance at Tao-ching and Wu Yu-ping, he stuttered:

"D-d-don't talk that way, Little Liu. As if I-I wanted to give up the revolution. No, I'm firm . . . I just want to avoid any more heavy losses. . . ."

"Losses, losses — that's all you think about!" cried Liu Li, then covered her eyes with both hands.

Tao-ching was feeling thoroughly uneasy. Though she queried what Hou Jui and Wu Yu-ping had said, for the moment she could not clarify the matter and set a new course because she was a newcomer, not fully acquainted with the situation. "What shall we do?" she asked herself in perplexity as she looked at the three others.

All four remained silent, their heads bent in thought. Finally Tao-ching broke the silence by asking Hou Jui, "In your opinion, how should we carry on here?"

Hou Jui smiled again before replying calmly, "A unified student federation is to be set up in Peiping. The student organizations in our university are still isolated and scattered. I think we should take steps, slowly, to bring them together."

"Not slowly but as quickly as possible!" retorted Liu Li crisply. "We must call on our fellow students to rise and fight — not wait quietly to be beaten!"

"Yes, we should act at once," agreed Tao-ching. "I think if Peking University is to join the student federation, we must first organize the progressive forces and then win over as many as possible of those who are neutral, in order to isolate the reactionaries. . . ."

"Yes, of course." Wu Yu-ping had been silent for some time. From his mechanical, deliberate tone, Tao-ching knew he was not convinced, but she did not want to waste time going into this now. Doing her best to keep calm, she summoned up all her courage to finish what she had to say:

"Of course, I've been speaking only of general principles, in line with the general spirit of the *August the First Manifesto* of the Party's Central Committee. When it comes to specific measures, I admit I know much less than the rest of you and have less experience. Anyhow, we should firmly carry out the policy of uniting the progressives, winning over the middle-of-the-roaders and isolating the reactionaries."

Wu Yu-ping said nothing, but looked down at the table and toyed with his pen. Liu Li fixed her round, bright eyes on Tao-ching's swollen face and made no comment either. But Hou Jui smiled and said:

"Well, let's get the Youth Leaguers and activists moving. Of course we should take measures to re-elect our student association and try to join the student federation." He asked Tao-ching almost as an afterthought, "Lu Fang, what are you going to do about Wang Hsiao-yen?"

"Have nothing to do with her!" snapped candid Liu Li.

Hou Jui looked at her with narrowed eyes and shook his head. "We'd spoil everything if we were rash enough to take that advice. Since Wang Hsiao-yen has been deceived by the Trotskyites, I think we ought to try to win her back."

"Can she still be counted as a middle-of-the-roader?" said Tao-ching reflectively. "For the present, I agree with Liu Li. Let's have nothing to do with her."

"No sense in approaching anyone like her!" put in Wu.

Hou Jui shook his head, protesting, "She's my classmate, so I know her better than you do. Even though she had something to do with that attack on you. . . ." He broke off to look at Tao-ching and the sight of her livid, battered face aroused

his indignation. He continued, "If we'd been stronger, if we'd done our work better, this could never have happened. A comrade who's just come to us. . . ." His distress affected Liu Li and Wu Yu-ping, both of whom looked at Tao-ching as if conscience-stricken. Their uneasiness increased when they saw that she was deep in thought, as if she had forgotten her rough-handling completely. Suddenly the little room became very quiet.

"Wang Hsiao-yen is stubborn, self-important and hard to approach," continued Hou Jui when no one said anything. "She is honest, though. I think the only way to open her eyes is to use facts to expose the Trotskyites."

"Hou Jui is quite right," said Tao-ching. "I know her well. She's just like that. But I can no longer approach her. As far as the middle-of-the-roaders are concerned, I think I'd better work on Li Huai-ying."

"Surely not!" protested the two young men almost simultaneously. "How can we hope to influence the toast of the university?"

"We were friends once. I'll try," Tao-ching persisted.

Then the meeting came to a close. When they rose to leave, Tao-ching put on her mask again. Liu Li was standing apart looking at her, and as soon as the young men had gone she hurried over to clasp Tao-ching's hand in her own soft fingers.

"Does it hurt?" she asked. "Is it very painful? Why not stay here for a day or two and have a good rest? My father and mother wouldn't mind."

Touched by the girl's sincere consideration, Tao-ching, who had not shed a tear when beaten and insulted earlier that day, suddenly felt her eyes brimming. Though they had met for the first time that day, Liu Li seemed near and dear to Tao-ching, who said from the bottom of her heart:

"Thanks, Liu Li. I'm all right now. I'm not in any pain, just anxious about our work. . . ." She broke off, gripping the girl's hand in embarrassment.

Chapter 30

Li Huai-ying's room, a cross between a study and a boudoir, was filled with all kinds of books, curios and knick-knacks. Sets of handsomely bound English books were ranged in the glass-fronted cabinet topped by an asparagus fern with luxuriant emerald leaves. The walls were hung with well-known Western paintings, including the *Last Supper* which was enclosed in a light green frame and hung just above the small iron bed.

Towards six that evening the light under a green silk shade was shedding a soft glow when Tao-ching entered. She found three other students there, among them Hou Jui.

The other young man and girl were strangers to her and she pretended not to know Hou Jui either. After greeting Huai-ying, she seated herself on the bed covered with a clean white counterpane.

"Let me introduce you!" said Huai-ying with a smile, flitting gracefully about the room. "This is Lu Fang, an old friend of mine. And these," she waved her hand, "are all fellow students: Wu Chien-chung, Chang Lien-jui and Hou Jui."

Tao-ching shook hands with each in turn, then sat down smilingly.

"Don't let me interrupt your conversation," she said, having noticed that they had broken off in the middle of a discussion.

Huai-ying declared with a laugh:

"Lu Fang, you've come just at the right time! These people here have almost deafened me. They're all against my reading Shakespeare. . . . One says, 'The country is on the verge of ruin.' Another, 'The situation is critical.' But what's the use of saying such things? Far better talk of something else."

"Enough of that, lovely! Don't lose yourself completely in your *Midsummer Night's Dream*!" Chang Lien-jui, a plump girl with rosy checks cut Huai-ying short, talking in staccato outbursts. "I know I haven't paid enough attention to current affairs, but I see you care even less than I do about them. Don't you know that the art treasures in the Palace Museum are being shipped south? Don't you see Japanese planes circling over our heads every day? Even our President Chiang Meng-lin was summoned to the Japanese barracks, detained and lectured to for three hours. What do all these things mean, if they're not signs that our country is heading for ruin?"

"That'll do, Lien-jui!" cried Huai-ying, stopping her ears. "Is talk like that your idea of passing the time? If you go on like this, Fatty, I'll turn you out. Save the country! Save the country! If I repeat that a hundred times, will that satisfy you?" Both of them laughed. But as one wave subsides only to be followed by others, Huai-ying had no sooner silenced Lien-jui than Wu Chien-chung and Hou Jui started up in their corner. Wu, a rather taciturn young man, said to Hou in a slow, measured voice:

"These days people are feeling alarmed. Sung Cheh-yuan is supposed to be collaborating with the Japanese over some sort of 'autonomy'. Don't you think the situation is becoming critical, Old Hou?"

"Yes, very serious. . . ." Hou replied with a casual smile.

"The situation is really very serious," Tao-ching put in when she saw that Hou Jui did not mean to continue. "You must have heard that a few days ago Cheng Ke, the Mayor of Tientsin, telegraphed to Chiang Kai-shek openly demanding an 'anti-Communist autonomous government' for the five northern provinces. Yesterday Japanese troops started large-scale manoeuvres along the Peiping-Liaoning and Peiping-Hankow Railways, taking Peiping as their 'imaginary objective'. The authorities at Tsinghua are so frightened that they're thinking of moving the university to Changsha. It's said the Northeast University is going to Taiyuan. . . . As a matter of fact, most colleges are preparing to evacuate. . . ."

"What? Is Tsinghua going to move?" broke in Huai-ying, her eyes wide.

"Ah, that shakes you! Because 'he' is at Tsinghua . . ." cried Lien-jui with a mocking smile. "A small country like Abyssinia with a population of no more than five and a half million dares resist a strong power like Italy and has scored a victory. But here in China — the Northeast is lost already, and northern China is going to be given up! It makes my blood boil to see the Japanese having it all their own way in Peiping."

At this, Hou Jui looked at them searchingly and said bitterly:

"Yesterday in East Changan Street, I saw with my own eyes two Japanese soldiers grab hold of a girl and bundle her into a car. The girl sobbed and screamed and all the passers-by were beside themselves with rage, but the Chinese police simply looked on as if nothing had happened. . . ."

"No more of this, now!" said Huai-ying, pursing her pretty little mouth. "You are always doing propaganda to create a tense atmosphere everywhere. How could such a thing happen in broad daylight? . . . Let's change the subject, shall we? Have a sweet and let me have a moment's rest. Liu Li was here just now, holding forth at great length. Now you're here to preach at me again!"

"Don't you even want to hear about Tsinghua's move?" retorted Lien-jui.

"What a tease you are, Fatty! Is Tsinghua really going to move? How is it I haven't heard anything about it? Why move? Even if the Japanese occupy Peiping, they'd hardly dare touch a university with a world reputation." Leaning against the bed, Huai-ying yawned.

"For shame! Being 'queen' of the university has gone to your head and made you lose all feeling for your country!" Lien-jui rattled off a refutation of Huai-ying's senseless argument, eyeing her so accusingly that their hostess started sulking. Tossing back her soft curls, she picked up an English book and leaned back against the bedpost to read, ignoring them all.

The atmosphere was distinctly strained. Since Hou Jui and Wu Chien-chung were not on such intimate terms with Huai-ying as Lien-jui, they did not like to butt in. Tao-ching, however, took advantage of the lull to tell a joke. Slowly and calmly she said:

"After the Ministry of Education ordered a revival of ancient learning this year, reading the classics and respecting Confucius were all the rage for a time in Peiping. A certain university responded so eagerly to the call that it sprang a complete surprise on the students this summer in the form of a test like the old imperial examinations. There were two subjects for Chinese composition. One was 'A scholar must know the arts before he takes up literature', and the other 'Reply to a letter from Emperor Wen Ti of the Han Dynasty in the style of Chao To, Prince of Nanyueh'. While most students were writing their answers, one scribbled this on his paper —"

"What?" Her annoyance forgotten, Huai-ying put down her book and turned curiously towards Tao-ching.

"One of them wrote, 'Emperor Wen Ti of the Han Dynasty sounds familiar, but I do not know whether he was the grandson or great-grandson of Emperor Kao Tsu. As for Chao Ta, Prince of Nanyueh — please note that this student wrote Chao Ta instead of Chao To — I have never heard of him and am therefore not in a position to write. I must go back and apply myself to my studies so as to be better prepared for the examination next year.' As soon as the examiner saw this paper, he picked up his brush and wrote the following comment in vermilion ink:

Kao Tsu was Wen Ti's pa;
Chao To it is, not Ta.
You've flunked this test, that's clear;
But sit again next year."

The earnest tone in which Tao-ching recited this verse set everybody in the room laughing, especially Lien-jui and Huai-ying, who doubled up with mirth. Only Tao-ching kept a straight face and as soon as the merriment had subsided, she continued, "Another student made even shorter work of the first topic, for he wrote:

Those who bow their knees to beauty
Must mend their ways when their sins come to light.

Having written this, he threw away his pen and left the hall abruptly without a word. The examiner was so enraged by this paper that flourishing his vermilion brush he wrote: 'Deserves forty strokes of the bamboo before being driven out!' An amusing outcome, wasn't it, of the Kuomintang's revival of ancient learning!"

"Lin Tao-ching, Lin Tao-ching! You used not to talk so well!" Huai-ying, still rocking with laughter, patted Tao-ching on the shoulder and unwittingly called her by her real name. At this the cheerful atmosphere in the room changed.

"Lin — Tao-ching?" murmured Lien-jui, glancing significantly at Wu Chien-chung and whispering into his ear. Unable to conceal their alarm, both turned to stare at Tao-ching as if she were some monster.

"What's the matter with you two?" asked Huai-ying in surprise. But Lien-jui had seized Wu by the arm and was running out of the door with him as if to escape from the plague.

The three young people left in the room remained silent for a while.

Hou Jui wanted to say something to Tao-ching, but refrained at a sign from her.

Huai-ying gently clapped her hands and with a meaningful smile at Tao-ching said knowingly:

"I get it! They must take you for a. . . . Am I right?" Rolling her big, lively eyes and arching her slender waist, she continued, "Well, I've always said no one good will join any party! The way parties intrigue against each other is simply disgusting. Politics is a dirty game to win fame and profit."

"You're quite wrong, Huai-ying," retorted Tao-ching, showing no sign of discomfiture over the unexpected blow she had received. She fixed her large, charming eyes upon Huai-ying. "You're opposed to politics, but no one, consciously or unconsciously, can get away from politics. Though you may not be aware of it yourself, years ago when you sheltered me and helped me out, when you hated Hu Meng-an, you had thrown yourself into the political struggle. Can't you see that, Huai-ying?"

"Enough, enough!" retorted the other girl, pouting. "You politicians always go in for sensationalism. I don't want to talk about such things. What have you done, Tao-ching, to make people like Lien-jui so afraid of you? I heard that Wang Chung beat you up. . . . What for? You're simply asking for trouble!"

Instead of replying, Tao-ching had a look at the book-shelves, where she found not only handsomely bound books but a number of American and French fashion magazines. Turning the pages of one, she came upon a coloured photograph of a golden-haired lady dressed in the latest Paris style. She raised her head and said smilingly to Huai-ying:

"I hear you have been chosen as the Queen of Peking University. You really are beautiful. It's pleasant to have good looks, but even better to combine them with a beautiful soul!"

Huai-ying's fair-complexioned face flushed pink, but she did not take offence. Patting Tao-ching's shoulder, she said:

"Lin Tao-ching, no, Lu Fang — I can't get used to your new name, that's why there was trouble. If that's true, you must be a perfect beauty, both in body and soul. Can't you stop preaching just for a minute? What a day I've had! For three whole hours Liu Li, Lien-jui and you have taken it in turns to lecture me till my head is nearly splitting!" She glared at them in mock anger, then smiled and assured them, "But in spite of everything, I like you just the same. I'm too soft-hearted, that's my trouble. You know, Lu Fang, they've not only made me Queen of Peking University but have given me the title Flower of Kindness. That's because I'm the same to everybody, no matter to what faction people belong." She laughed again, an innocent, charming laugh. No one could question her warm-heartedness.

"Queen and Flower of Kindness — yes, that's you!" put in Hou Jui. Unable to join in the girls' lively chatter, he had picked up a novel and been glancing through it. Now delivering himself with a smile at this remark, he rose to take his leave. Before he had gone very far, Tao-ching caught up with him.

Walking down the dark, deserted street with her, Hou Jui said with a trace of impatience:

"I don't understand why you should take such pains trying to win over someone like the Queen of the University. I stuck it out because I wanted to see you — but what an ordeal!"

After a moment's silence, Tao-ching turned to gaze at Hou Jui with eyes that glittered in the darkness.

"Hou Jui, don't you understand the spirit of the *August the First Manifesto*? We mustn't adopt a closed-door policy as we did in the past. Huai-ying has a good heart and a warm sense of justice. Of course, she's muddle-headed when it comes to politics, because of her family background and the bourgeois influence of her friend Huang Mei-shuang, that poetess in the Catholic University. But you must look at the matter from another angle. She can influence other students — she's their queen and a hard-working girl who is glad to help others. She enjoys a certain prestige not only in the English Department but in the university as a whole. Shouldn't we do our best to win over a student like that? Aren't you for winning over the middle-of-the-roaders?"

"Yes, yes, you know better than I do. I'm only afraid our efforts will be wasted!" said Hou Jui, smiling bitterly. They were walking along in the dark with a piercing wind against them. Presently he continued rather seriously, "Lu Fang, things aren't going too well. Our plan to reorganize the student association and to join the student federation. . . ."

"Yes, what of it?" prompted Tao-ching hastily.

"Well," replied Hou Jui slowly. "We did hold a meeting. We did our best to win over the students, but so far only a few have agreed to join."

"Give me the details!" Tao-ching turned to look at him. "What happened? Why did we fail?"

Hou Jui nodded listlessly. There was nothing of the Smiling Buddha about him now, for his voice was low and apathetic. "First we rallied some progressives like Chang Lien-jui and Yu Tse-li, and though they were in a minority they were very active, realizing how grave the situation is. But the handful of students belonging to the C.C. clique and Trotskyites put up a tough fight, hitting right and left. The Trotskyites pretended to be ultra 'left', while the C.C. and *étatiste* cliques used rightist threats, accusing those in favour of joining the federation of playing into the hands of the Communists. The progressives argued heatedly to refute all those reactionary lies — it was a stormy meeting. Finally some middle-of-the-roaders, like Wu Chien-chung whom you just met, came over to our side; but the majority found things too hot for them and left. Worse still, the reactionaries had some hoodlums ready, so that when the meeting was in full swing stones were hurled through the windows. The upshot was utter confusion."

"Were we to blame, do you think, for this fiasco?" asked Tao-ching. Side by side, they were walking slowly north past the Red Building.

After a moment's thought, Hou Jui said, "Yes. We weren't well prepared for the meeting, we didn't do enough propaganda or organize our forces properly. We expected the whole student body to turn up to re-elect the student association and then to pass a resolution in its name to join the federation. As things turned out, however, less than one-third of the students came to the meeting in the auditorium of the Third Hostel. Since a re-election was out of the question, we could only propose that the old association join the federation. Some supported the motion but others opposed it. In the end, some of the classes in favour decided to join, while those against refused. That's the unfortunate way it ended."

Tao-ching said nothing and Hou Jui was silent too. They were passing through a deserted windy lane when she stopped abruptly and, having made sure that no one was about, gently took his hand and said with passionate conviction:

"Hou Jui, don't lose hope! Victory is bound to be ours. You were right in saying we didn't prepare well enough and were too rash. It's not surprising that the meeting should have ended as it did, if we called it before the students were sufficiently stirred up." Tao-ching was talking like an elder sister, though she and Hou Jui were approximately the same age. Far from uttering a word of disapproval, she did her best to encourage him, saying, "I believe the students here are progressive and politically conscious, but because we haven't done our utmost to arouse and organize them, some bury themselves in books as a sort of escapism. But, Hou Jui, once we've stirred them to action, what have we to fear from a handful of reactionaries?" She gave a low laugh, full of confidence. Hou Jui, infected by her mood, laughed too.

"Thank you, Lu Fang! When you're in difficulties, you need support and encouragement. I'm sure that in the near future the situation here will change completely." His tone had suddenly altered, and he hesitated now to say what was on his mind. Some time passed before he blurted out, "Lu Fang, I've something to tell you but. . . ."

"Go on, Hou Jui. Speak out!"

After a slight pause, he said, "Lu Fang, it's going to be awkward if you appear openly in Peking University. Hadn't you better leave? You see, a rumour has gone round that a special agent, a woman renegade, is carrying on activities here as a student. That was why Chang Lien-jui took fright and ran away when Li Huai-ying called out your name. Lu Fang, don't you think you'd better keep out of the way for a while?"

There was a long silence.

"No, Hou Jui, I can't leave Peking University!" replied Tao-ching at last, and her tone was firm. "I've been given this job by the Party and must stick to it, come what may. Of course, I must be more careful — I can stop attending lectures and going to some public meetings. But I must carry on my work among the students." She stopped to think for a moment and then continued, "This is the most difficult period for us; it's also a turning point of decisive importance, so I can't leave you now. I must do all I can to help. There are only three Party members left in the university, and our work is so difficult and involved!" She broke off abruptly.

"All right, but I'd advise you to be more careful." He blinked and a mischievous look came into his eyes. "Tell me, Lu Fang, how did you become the sort of person you are now?"

"What do you mean? I don't understand."

"You used to be rather sentimental and fond of solitude, didn't you? What has made you so different now?"

Somewhat startled, Tao-ching met his kindly eyes.

"How do you know what I used to be like? We've only been working together for a short time."

"It's interesting when you come to think of it. I knew the name Lin Tao-ching long ago. When I was in high school, I often went to my aunt's home, and my cousin was a good friend of yours at that time. She often spoke of you and what you were like, and her accounts made a deep impression on me. To her, you were almost a legendary figure, quite fascinating! When you came to Peking University, I never dreamed you were Lin Tao-ching. It wasn't until this evening, when Li Huai-ying called you by your real name, that I realized you must be my cousin's former school-friend."

"Who is your cousin?"

"Chen Wei-ju. Do you remember her?"

"Of course. How is she now?"

"She's dead."

"Dead! How did she die?"

"She committed suicide."

Tao-ching's heart contracted as she remembered the girl with well-defined eyebrows and lovely eyes who had been so close to her. She turned slowly to ask Hou Jui, "Why did she commit suicide? Hadn't she become a rich lady after her marriage?"

The dull tread of a policeman's heavy boots was approaching, so Hou Jui gently put his arm through hers as he continued, "Her husband neglected her for another woman. In a fit of anger she took an overdose of sleeping-tablets. It's tragic to think that she left two small children behind. All this happened last year."

For a long while neither of them spoke, as if silently lamenting the fate of unfortunate, weak-willed Chen Wei-ju.

"Hou Jui, your cousin was right when she said that I was sentimental, aloof and self-willed. Even now I haven't changed very much, I'm afraid. I still have many shortcomings. Chang Lien-jui's behaviour this evening disturbed me so much that it was all I could do to check my tears and pull myself together. . . . But Hou Jui, my dear comrade. . . ." She gripped his hand firmly. "What a difficult period this is! The Party leadership hasn't sent anyone here to get in touch with us, and I'm misunderstood and hated by many of the students. All this hurts me much less, though, than the stalemate in our work, the failure of our Party comrades to see eye to eye. . . . We must put all we've got into our work, Hou Jui! I do hope you'll help me out."

Silence fell again. Hou Jui looked at her for a while without speaking, and Tao-ching gave him a searching and distressed glance. Without saying more, they parted.

Chapter 31

That night when Tao-ching returned to her lodgings, she unlocked the door, entered the room and threw herself down on the bed without lighting the paraffin lamp. The difficulties and setbacks that were crowding in upon her would not let her sleep. She felt like an unskilled doctor unable to diagnose what was wrong with Peking University, let alone cure it. True, Hou Jui and the other Party members were not bold enough, but they were working hard. Moreover, in the light of the experience of the demonstration held a couple of years previously to mark the March the Eighteenth Incident, perhaps they were right to counsel caution; for many young people had been beaten, arrested or killed on that occasion. Worried and distressed, Tao-ching turned the matter over in her mind. This was the first important task the Party had given her to do on her own, but a fortnight had gone by since her arrival at the university and no headway had been made in the work. "What shall I do?" she asked herself, alone in the dark room. She remembered Liu Yi-feng's parting advice, "Hsiu-lan, you're going to be on your own. It won't be like working here with me. The reactionaries say, with some reason, that students are even harder to cope with than soldiers. I don't know the situation there, so I can't be of much help to you. But always remember two things — first, in the spirit of the *August the First Manifesto*, unite with as many people as possible — don't close the door on them; secondly, rely on the masses, rely on the Party and pay attention to the views of the Party members in the university."

Liu Yi-feng's advice was still ringing in Tao-ching's ears, for she used it as a criterion for her actions. A careful self-examination convinced her that she had never departed from these instructions. Notwithstanding this, she was nonplussed by the impasse in their work. She longed to make a full report to Liu Yi-feng or Chiang Hua so that, with their help, all the difficulties could quickly be ironed out. On second thoughts, however, she realized that according to the Party rules for underground work she should not approach them because she was no longer under their direct leadership. Unfortunately she did not know who was immediately above her because no one had got in touch with her. Difficulties were bearing down upon her like lowering black clouds. To make matters worse, it was now November and the weather was turning cold. She had no job, no source of income, and could no longer count on help from Hsiao-yen. She carried on as best as she could, often making do with only a scanty meal. Sometimes all she ate in a whole day were a few baked sweet potatoes. "What shall I do? . . ." This dilemma loomed large in her anxious mind when she was alone on bitterly cold nights and in her dreams.

One morning she had a talk with two Peking University students whom she knew. The result was not very satisfactory. In the afternoon she could control herself no longer, and decided to go and have a talk with Liu Yi-feng. She hurried towards the end of the lane where she and the elder woman had lived and worked together. Then she slowed down, torn by conflicting emotions. "No, I mustn't call on her. What if. . . ." How could she justify calling at the underground headquarters which were liable to be raided any time by the enemy? She hardened herself to walk away again, but instead of returning to her lodgings she went along East Changan Street till she found herself in front of Chungshan Park. The streets were almost deserted and pedestrians were few and far between because it was winter. In her anxiety to establish contact with the Party and ask the advice of veteran Party members, Tao-ching hardly noticed this. Scarcely knowing what she did, she walked towards Hsuan Wu Men, to the south of which stood Chiang Hua's office — the New Chihli* Provincial Guild. By the time she reached Chungnanhai Park, however, she had herself under control again, and knew that she could not call on Chiang Hua either. So she entered the park and strolled along the quiet shore of the lake, passionately wishing that she could accidentally meet him or Liu Yi-feng. . . .

The tall old palace buildings in the park were silent, as if asleep, the thin ice on the half frozen lake was sparkling in the sun, a cold west wind was whirling the fallen leaves, and the splendid park was bleak and deserted. Growing tired of walking, Tao-ching stopped to lean against a tall pine. Suddenly a round-faced, handsome young man drew near and stared at her with happy surprise. After a moment's hesitation, he approached and asked:

"Aren't you Little Lin?"

"Hsu Ning! is it really you?" Overjoyed and astonished, Tao-ching extended her hand. "Fancy meeting you here!"

"I thought it was you," said Hsu Ning, "but wasn't sure. You're very thin, Tao-ching. What has happened to you?" The smile on his virile face expressed his delight and concern as he took her hand.

She beamed at him.

"I saw you when I was walking along the lakeside, but had no idea it was you. How is everything? When were you released? How is your mother?"

He did not immediately answer her questions, but led her to a bench by the pathway, where they sat down together. Surveying her keenly with his bright eyes, Hsu Ning said:

"I've been trying to get news of you for months, Tao-ching, but nobody could tell me where you were. Imagine meeting by chance like this! Well!

> Wear out iron shoes yet search in vain —
> All unawares your wish you'll gain!

That old group of ours has been thoroughly broken up, hasn't it? What different roads we took! Some have been killed or imprisoned, others have turned renegade or given up the struggle, still others have disappeared. What about you? What are you doing now? Weren't you arrested too?"

"Can't you answer my questions before cross-examining me?" Tao-ching smiled and withdrew her hand. "I got out in July, after a year in gaol. How long have you been out?"

"Only a month. I was in for more than two years. Do you know what those two years did to me, Tao-ching? They taught me much more than I could have learned outside. Really, I should thank Generalissimo Chiang for steeling me!" He chuckled, his lively eyes radiating happy confidence. Tao-ching realized that he had indeed changed — gone for ever was the carefree, weak-willed lad she remembered, and now a firm revolutionary was sitting by her side.

She gave a brief, plain account of her own experiences, making herself out as no more than a sympathizer with the revolution. Then she asked, "What are your plans?"

Hsu Ning thought for a while and smiled. "I'm going to north Shensi. I've heard that the Red Army has arrived there after its Long March. Chairman Mao Tsetung is already there. To tell you the truth, Tao-ching, I've been looking for you to ask you to go with us. Will you come to the Mecca of our revolution?"

Tao-ching was tempted to agree. For years she had longed to join in the hard armed struggle, and to see their great leader. Hsu Ning's words stirred up that desire buried deep in her heart. If she could only see Chairman Mao Tsetung, and meet the heroes of the Long March and the invincible soldiers of the Red Army, how happy she would be! The prospect tempted her even more whenever she thought of her present situation.

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* The old name for Hopei Province.

"What a miraculous feat!" she said quietly but with ardent admiration. "The Red Army had to smash the encirclement, blockade and pursuit of the Kuomintang armed forces which attacked it both on land and from the air, and to march twenty-five thousand *li* before successfully reaching northern Shensi. It won through these arduous struggles under the wise leadership of Chairman Mao. Hsu Ning, are you going there soon? You don't think I've changed, do you? Otherwise you'd hardly dare tell me all this." She smiled as she concluded.

"Of course I trust you. You have changed, changed for the better, not for the worse. Don't you trust me, Tao-ching?"

She nodded and said, "Some people can't stand up to that cruel testing, but I know something of your behaviour in prison. That's why I'm glad to see you. When are you going? I'd like to see you off."

"You aren't coming, then?" Hsu Ning showed signs of disappointment. "Why not? I thought you would want to go. As for me, I just can't remain in Peiping any longer. You know the way my mother keeps pulling me back. Make up your mind to go with us, Tao-ching! It'll be good for you and for our cause."

Tao-ching bent her head in silence and twisted her handkerchief, as she went through a sharp mental struggle. She had dreamed day and night of going to north Shensi. She thought of her present problems, of Wang Chung's monkey-like face, Chang Lien-jui's spiteful eyes, and of Wang Hsiao-yen, of the difficulties of working without a leader, and of the unsatisfactory position in Peking University. . . . She felt completely unable to reach a decision.

"Can't you make up your mind, Tao-ching?" asked Hsu Ning earnestly. "Since the Long March and the Red Army's arrival in the north to resist Japanese aggression, north Shensi has become extremely important. Cadres are badly needed there. If you decide to go, I'll help you overcome any difficulties that may arise. Do agree to come with us!"

Tao-ching raised her head, too occupied with her thoughts to notice his anxiety. Then she reached a decision, felt calmer, and firmly said:

"Hsu Ning, I'm sorry I can't go. I have work to do in Peiping. But I hope we may meet in Yenan some day."

Hsu Ning did not insist. It was clear that Tao-ching had changed considerably during the last two years. To be sure, she still retained her youthful charm and good looks, but her firm step, her quiet voice, and the strength of character shining in her eyes, told him that she had outgrown her hot-headed, impetuous girlhood. He could no longer treat her as his pupil or lecture her on general principles but must respect her as an equal. He looked thoughtful for a while; then his face cleared and he said, "All right, Tao-ching. You may just as well stay in Peiping. We shall leave in about ten days. I'll look forward to the time when we meet again in Yenan!"

A black-uniformed policeman in heavy boots was swaggering towards them along the gravel path. Tao-ching clasped Hsu Ning's hand and gave him a charming smile. He took the hint and stood up. Arm in arm, they sauntered towards the policeman.

They walked side by side without speaking till they reached a rockery, then Hsu Ning halted and released Tao-ching's arm.

"Let's sit down and talk. You're not too busy, are you?"

Tao-ching shook her head and they sat down facing each other. After a little while, Hsu Ning said, "Tao-ching, you once passed yourself off as my younger sister. I'm going away, but of course I can't tell my mother — there's nothing I can do to help her. Will you keep an eye on her as if you really were my younger sister? Try to cheer her up and persuade her to go to Shanghai where she was trying to send me. Once I've left, she may not want to go; but she'd have a very hard time of it on her own." Hsu Ning was speaking slowly and had lowered his head. Although he had made up his mind to sacrifice everything for the revolution, although he had been tested and tried more than once, when it came to leaving his old mother — perhaps for good — his mother who put all her hopes in him, he could not but feel distressed.

Hsu Ning had been released from the "First Model Prison" in October 1935. When his mother took him home, she seemed to be seeing him for the first time. She hovered over him, laughing and crying by turns, muttering, "You young rascal, at last I've got you home again. You naughty boy, from now on you will have to behave." Hsu Ning had smiled and, looking at the deep lines on her face and the greying hair at her temples, had remarked, "Mother, you've aged a great deal."

The old woman looked at her son's face, now so thin, and wiping her tears replied, "It's all because of you, my dear. You must never leave me again!" Then with a smile she told him that his uncle had found him a well-paid job in a Shanghai bank, which would enable them to live together in quiet comfort.

Hsu Ning grinned but made no answer. To change the subject, he said, "Mother, they told me you begged our fellow provincial Hu Meng-an to use his influence to get me out — you sent him presents, didn't you? You ought to go and thank him now that I'm out."

She stared at him as if he were Hu Meng-an, and spat contemptuously. "Don't speak of him! A man with the heart of a wolf and the guts of a fox!" Then softening she continued, "Let's go to Shanghai, son. What's done is done, may Buddha be merciful! Don't let's think of what's past. All I pray, day and night, is to live the few years left to me in peace."

Brushing this aside, the young man blurted out: "I'm not going to Shanghai, mother. I have work to do here in Peiping." As he said this, she fainted.

Recalling this, Hsu Ning sat there silent. After that episode, although he had made up his mind to go to north Shensi, he promised his mother to go to Shanghai with her.

"Tao-ching," he began again, more earnestly. "You visited me twice in prison before they put you into a different gaol and we lost touch with each other. From that time on, however, I felt very glad to have a younger sister like you. Do you know, after those two visits my opinion of you changed completely? I often thought of you and worried about you. As soon as I got out I searched everywhere for you. At last we're together again. . . ." He spoke with feeling. His handsome face, though thinner now, still had all the vigour of youth.

Tao-ching heard him out attentively and then said softly: "Don't worry. So long as I'm in Peiping, I shall do my best for your mother. I pity her with all my heart."

Hsu Ning looked with deep gratitude into her warm, steadfast eyes and asked abruptly:

"Tao-ching, are you married?"

"No," she answered frankly.

"Then why not come with us? Please do!"

The setting sun was shining on the grass and rocks. Tao-ching stood up and looked around. The park was almost empty now. She turned her head with a faint smile.

"It's time to go. Let's talk as we go, shall we?"

As they walked towards the exit, she said:

"Hsu Ning, you want me to go to north Shensi with you. As a matter of fact, there's nothing I'd like better. How often I've dreamed of going there! But I mustn't give way to this impulse. You know perfectly well how tense the situation in North China has become — what happened in the Northeast is threatening to repeat itself, and Peiping would be the first place to bear the brunt. That's why I can't leave." She looked almost apologetically at Hsu Ning, and they walked on in pensive silence.

It was dark by the time Tao-ching returned to her lodgings. She unlocked the door, groped her way in and lit the paraffin lamp, which cast her thin, tired shadow on the wall. She was tempted to lie down and rest, but her unheated room was too cold, especially as she was only wearing a knitted jacket and had eaten nothing all day. On the pretext of paying a neighbourly visit, she went to the landlady's room to warm up, and brought back a pot of boiling water. She felt rather better after drinking two cups.

This was her usual reading hour, and she sat down at the desk with a book, but she could not concentrate, and sat there in low spirits, ravenously hungry. She had hoped to get some money from Liu Yi-feng or Chiang Hua, but had seen neither, and had not felt able to ask Hsu Ning for help. She turned out her pockets but did not find a single cent. The pawnshop again? But what was there to pawn? Her padded and cotton gowns had been pawned long ago. All she had left were a knitted jacket and a lined gown. Looking round the empty room, she told herself with a wry smile, "Nothing but four bare walls." Pressing one hand to her stomach, she rested her head on the desk and had a vision of Hsu Ning's ardent smile. "Come with us! If there are any difficulties, I'll help you." She shook her head with a smile and opened a wicker basket that stood by her bed.

The basket was nearly empty. It contained a few old magazines and worn socks, nothing that could be pawned or sold. In one corner was a small package wrapped carefully in a scarf of magenta georgette. The sight made her heart beat faster and she could not resist undoing and taking out the cardigan Lin Hung had given her in her last hour.

Tao-ching had worn this precious gift for a whole year while she was in prison, because she was afraid it might get lost or be seized by one of the warders. As soon as she was freed she took it off and decided not to wear it again for fear of spoiling it. She had wrapped it carefully in a pretty scarf and put it away at the bottom of her basket. However cold the weather, however short of money she was, this treasure must not be touched.

Now, late this cold night, Tao-ching pressed the cardigan to her heart, her eyes fixed on this gift sealed with blood.

Prisoners, prisoners of the times,
We are not prisoners but captives. . . .

In a low voice she sang the song that Lin Hung had taught her.

A cold wind buffeted the papered window. The feeble flame of her lamp cast a faint light on the four bare walls. Grief and indignation mingled in her heart with feelings of happiness, mutual understanding, and friendship. The thought of Lin Hung reminded her of Lu Chia-chuan. So, sleepless, hungry and cold, she wrote these lines:

Brave warrior,
You did not die;
Your clear, inspiring voice
Rings out through this land trampled underfoot;
The shot fired at Rain Blossom Mount
Did not destroy you,
But those digging their own graves!

Summer night, clear, fragrant night;
Outside your window nameless wild flowers bloom;
A bright moon shines on your calm sleeping face,
The nightingale is singing in front of your window,
Soft and sweet she sings.
Rest assured, fallen warrior,
The girl you love has taken up the weapons you laid down;
You lit the fire of vengeance in her breast,
She has wiped away her tears and is marching on,
So that lovers may never more be cruelly parted,
So that children may nestle in their parents' arms,
And all the dreams of your youth may come true!
Brave warrior,
She has taken up the weapons you laid down.

Chapter 32

Tao-ching was in the habit of studying the Marxist classics for two hours first thing every morning. She was reading *"Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder* when someone in the courtyard called out, "Does a Miss Lu live here?"

She hurried into the courtyard.

It was Chiang Hua, and her heart leaped up as they clasped hands.

Chiang Hua was wearing a shabby overcoat, his swarthy weather-beaten face was lined, and he had not shaved for some days. Standing in the middle of her room and rubbing his hands for warmth, he looked searchingly at Tao-ching, then at the cold, bare walls, and grinned.

"You've been having a hard time of it, haven't you?" he asked.

She watched his familiar movements with a naive, helpless smile.

"Other things don't matter, but when no one comes to give me a lead, that does worry me!"

With a teasing look he said, "Well, how's everything? Worried to tears, I suppose?" His attitude surprised Tao-ching, who had never known him joke before. He had impressed her as supremely serious and calm.

She told him all that had happened since she came to the university, concluding, "Though I've been here only a little more than a month, I've met with greater difficulties and more setbacks than ever before in my life. I've lost count of the number of times I've been slapped in the face by the Trotskyites. Except for the time I was in prison, I haven't been slapped like that since I was a child. Still, I can put up with it, but two other things are hard to take. One is the way Wang Hsiao-yen — she used to be my best friend, you know — has turned against me and has been the cause of some of my troubles here, another is the fact that I'm not much use here. We haven't made any headway in our work. I've let the Party down. . . ." She raised her head and wiped the tears in her eyes. "I've been very worried because no one's got in touch with me."

The room was so cold that Chiang Hua was still rubbing his hands to keep them warm. When Tao-ching had finished speaking he started pacing up and down.

"Don't worry, comrade! Someone's come now."

"So you're my contact! I'm so glad!" She laughed for joy.

"The situation has changed a lot, Tao-ching," said Chiang Hua unhurriedly. "It's all very involved. That's why I couldn't come earlier. Do you know that at the end of October the Japanese pressed the authorities in Peiping and Tientsin for another purge of all persons suspected of anti-Japanese activities? But there's a bright side to the picture too. . . ." He lowered his voice and regarded her earnestly. "In October the Red Army completed the Long March and reached north Shensi to join forces with the armed units under Liu Chih-tan. The Chinese revolution has taken a tremendous step forward. There's never been anything like the Long March, I think, not in our history, nor in the history of the world. Its effect on the whole revolution is bound to be stupendous. The enemy boasts of defeating and smashing us, when the fact is that the Long March is a new rising tide of revolution, a fresh victory for us. The other side of the picture is black. The Japanese are stretching their bloody hands deeper and deeper into northern China. The Hsiangho Incident this October is one example. During the Japanese manoeuvres along the Peiping-Liaoning and Tientsin-Pukow Railways, a group of 'farmers' besieged the county seat of Hsiangho and the Japanese claimed that these 'farmers' wanted 'autonomy'. That was the start of a rapid succession of movements for 'autonomy' — 'autonomy' for the five northern provinces, anti-Communist 'autonomy' for Hopei, and 'autonomy' for Hopei and Chahar may be claimed any moment now. Under the pretext of establishing 'autonomy' everywhere under Chinese traitors, Japanese troops have been pouring into northern China, including Peiping and Tientsin. The situation has become very grave, Tao-ching." He knitted his dark brows and stared at her, engrossed by the gravity of the situation. Tao-ching, who had listened intently, shared his feelings. To save China was their paramount duty. But how? How were the Communists to lead the Chinese people to disperse the dark clouds of oppression and rally the people under the banner of national liberation? . . .

Tao-ching thought of the students, many still dreaming of their B.A. and M.A. degrees, or concerned only with their personal comfort and interests. . . . She had a fleeting vision of Huai-ying's gay, frivolous smile and of Hsiao-yen's bewildered, lost look. . . . She sat on her bed and sighed.

"Tell me, Old Chiang," she asked despondently, "what's the use of all this work among intellectuals, among students in universities and high schools? When the armed struggle's won, when the workers and peasants have made the revolution, the literati will naturally fall into line and join the revolution. Why bother with them now? . . ." The quizzical look in Chiang Hua's eyes made her stop. She rested her head on her hands rather sulkily.

"What's come over you, Tao-ching?" he cried reproachfully. "Of course the armed struggle is the basic thing in the Chinese revolution, and that's why all of us are so concerned about the battles and victories of the Red Army. And of course the workers and peasants are the main force of the revolutionary struggle, the mainstay of the Chinese revolution. But does that mean our work among intellectuals is unimportant or useless? That's a strange way of looking at it! Who started the May the Fourth Movement against imperialism and feudalism which pushed the revolution so much forward? Wasn't it those same literati?" He smiled, picked up a cup of cold water from the table and drank thirstily. Turning back to her, he resumed in a still lower voice, "Your work is not only meaningful, Tao-ching, it is very important. Just as important as work among workers and peasants. Some day you may have the chance to go among workers and peasants, but for the time being don't yield — just do the best you can here."

Tao-ching laughed. Chiang Hua struck her as more humorous than before. "Who's yielding ground?" she demanded. "Of course I'll stick it out. But we're hardly making any headway at Peking University. The students just bury themselves in their books and dream about becoming scholars and celebrities."

Chiang Hua sat down and said slowly:

"No wonder you're so worried — you've seen only a small section of the whole. After all this time you've failed to see the real truth about Peking University or to understand the majority of the students. It's no use concentrating on people like Wang Hsiao-yen or Li Huai-ying. Hurry up and get close to the rank and file!"

"Why. . . ." Tao-ching stared at him in astonishment. "How can you say I'm not close to them, Old Chiang, when I've been talking with the students every day and getting to know them?"

Chiang Hua grinned and went off on another tack.

"Do you know I'm working in the student federation?"

"In the student federation?" she echoed in surprise.

"Yes. The students who have been quiet for four years since the September the Eighteenth Incident and our demonstration in Nanking are picking up now and getting more and more active. By the way, how many Peking University students have read the joint manifesto issued by the student associations of ten Peiping and Tientsin schools?"

"A good many of them, I imagine," replied Tao-ching. "Of course, some students never go near the bulletin board. Why are you doing student work again? Are you going to lead our work here?"

"I don't think so. You'll have to take charge yourself — there aren't enough of us to go round. Aren't there many mass organizations at the university, Tao-ching? The Study Society, the Esperanto Club, the New Latinized Written Language Association and the Association for People's Armed Defence are all active. Get out of that narrow circle of yours and take part in the activities of these groups. That'll give you confidence and strength in your work, and you'll know how to convince Hou Jui and the others. . . . Get busy! We must bring the Peking University student association under our control and make it join the student federation. Then we'll be in a better position to lead the campaign to save China."

Tao-ching listened attentively, turning his words over in her mind. The realization of her own childishness and inexperience made her determine to learn to do better. Taking fresh heart, she asked Chiang Hua, "What should I do about Wang Hsiao-yen?"

He thought for a while and answered with a nod, "To my mind, considering the circumstances and your past friendship, you'd better try to win her over rather than ignore her. Of course it will be a long and risky job, because of Tai Yu. Hou Jui was right when he said that Wang Hsiao-yen would only come over to our side if the reactionaries were exposed."

Tao-ching laughed and remarked, "Old Chiang, how I envy you! You know how to work among students as well as peasants. No wonder the Party's sent you to the student federation. I've come to realize more and more that even compared with Lu Chia-chuan. . . ." She broke off in embarrassment.

"How can I compare with him!" rejoined Chiang Hua, to her surprise. "His grit and fearlessness remain a shining example for us all. . . ." Seeing the question in her agitated eyes, he added, "Don't you know what a fight Old Lu put up in the Peiping prison? I heard about it recently from a friend and was deeply stirred. His almost incredible fortitude under those conditions is a tremendous inspiration to me." Chiang Hua was lost in thought for a moment before he continued, "Both his legs were broken under torture after the enemy had found out he was leading a hunger-strike. . . ." He told her the agony Lu Chia-chuan had endured, dragging himself across his cell and tapping signals on the walls to warn his fellow prisoners.

Tao-ching gave him a stricken glance when he ended, and rested her head on the table, hiding her face. When she looked up again, her expressoin was stern.

"Old Chiang, the thought of a man like him makes me love

this world more than ever. I'm ashamed because I'm still swayed by so many unworthy thoughts and selfish interests. A few days ago, when things were going badly, I wanted to go to north Shensi with Hsu Ning. And today again I've shown how many wrong views I have. . . ."

Instead of answering her, Chiang Hua began to look about the room. She asked shyly:

"What are you looking for? Water? I'm afraid I'm so hard up that I can't afford to light the stove. I buy snacks ready cooked and go to the landlady's room when I want water. Wait a moment and I'll get you some."

Chiang Hua raised his big hands to stop her, saying, "No, don't go. Do you have any coal? If so, you can light the stove while I go out and get steamed rolls and something to go with them. Let's have lunch together, shall we? We've been talking so long that it's almost twelve o'clock."

"Splendid!" cried Tao-ching happily. "How is it that you're so free today? How long can you stay?"

Chiang Hua thought for a moment.

"I've nothing to do till four this afternoon," he replied. "How about you?"

"I'm not too busy either. All I've learned these days at the university is how to be patient!"

"All right, then. Well, I'm off to the market. Will you light the fire?" With this, he strode out.

By the time he came back with meat, vegetables and steamed rolls, Tao-ching had a good fire going and had taken the stove into the room. When she saw the packages, she asked in surprise:

"Why did you buy so much? Are you leaving this for me to eat over New Year?"

"Not for New Year, but to last you a few days. Don't think I can't see that you've been starving yourself."

"These packages remind me of something, Old Chiang." Her teeth flashed in a smile.

"What's that?"

"Do you remember the first time you came to see me in Tinghsien? When I sent the janitor to buy food for you, didn't you ask me why I'd been to such expense? Are you settling that old score?"

Chiang Hua laughed and Tao-ching joined in. The cold and bare little room had become warm and cheerful. She boiled some water and toasted the rolls, while he chopped up the meat and vegetables, making a merry rat-tat-tat on the board. Watching his big skilful hands, Tao-ching marvelled, "Why, there's nothing he can't do!"

Yes, he was skilled not only in preparing food but in cooking it too. When all was ready, she set the table and the two of them sat by the stove to enjoy a good, hot meal together. Chiang Hua helped her to wash up the dishes and tidy the room. Quick and deft in his movements, he seemed to find such satisfaction in the work that Tao-ching did not stop him. Soon everything was set to rights. Seeing him standing there with soiled hands, looking right and left to see what else needed doing, she said with a smile:

"Old Chiang, I'm beginning to understand how many ingredients have gone into your character — you're both a worker and an intellectual."

Watching Tao-ching's eyes, clear as the waters of a lake, her pale, lovely face and her frank enthusiasm, Chiang Hua suddenly became speechless. What could he say? He had long been in love with this warm-hearted girl. As he watched her develop step by step from an ordinary intellectual in sympathy with the revolution, into a staunch and trustworthy Bolshevik, his love for her had deepened. But all these years he had hidden and tried to ignore it. Only occasionally, when caught off his guard, did he show any sign of it. How could he do otherwise? She had given her heart to his schoolmate and comrade-in-arms Lu Chia-chuan, whom he loved and respected, and they would have made a well-matched couple. At first he had hoped that, once Lu Chia-chuan was released, his own feeling for Tao-ching would give way to pleasure in their happiness. Then he had learned of Lu Chia-chuan's death and read his letter to her. Even then he could not reveal his love for her. He knew how she was suffering and felt a deep pity for her. Since then he had watched over her like an elder brother, deliberately staying away to keep his feelings in check. The time had slipped by and today he realized that she was not simply a staunch Communist but a tender woman who craved for affection. From the look in her eyes, he could see that she was lonely. Had he not tormented himself long enough by waiting?

He warmed his hands over the stove in silence as he recalled the past. The hot blood of youth was racing in his veins — he was tortured by indecision. He raised his head at last, cast a searching look at her, then consulted his watch and said in a calm voice:

"It's half past three. Time I was off. I'd like to have a talk with you tomorrow evening. Will you be free?"

Tao-ching aroused herself from a reverie too. As if she guessed what he wanted to say, she replied quietly and gently:

"Yes, come tomorrow evening. I'll be expecting you. You go first. I'm also going out to see somebody."

When they parted at the shabby gate, their eyes met for a moment. Tao-ching said with a smile:

"Thank you for your advice. I mean to do a good job at the university. Another thing: May I write to Wang Hsiao-yen?"

Chiang Hua smiled. "That's up to you. Well, goodbye for now!"

She was turning away when he stopped her. With a glance down the quiet, deserted lane, he produced all the money he had and thrust it at her.

"I nearly forgot. You're not wearing enough. Pawned all your clothes, I suppose? Well, go and get them out, you must keep warm!"

His low voice was kind yet stern. And Tao-ching, looking at him, accepted the money in silence.

Chapter 33

At dusk, the west wind whistled through a quiet lane, whirling the fallen leaves. A red-lacquered gate opened with a creak and Tai Yu emerged hurriedly, head lowered, shoulders hunched against the cold, and holding on to his grey felt hat. He had only taken a few steps, when a shrill voice ordered him to stop.

"Come back! Come back!" cried the voice. "I haven't finished with you. What's the hurry?"

He halted reluctantly, afraid to disobey. A dishevelled woman's head with artificially waved hair showed through the crack of the gate as he hastily turned around and scuttled inside.

The woman closed the gate, making the inner passageway darker.

"You fool!" she cried. "You stupid, crazy fool!" She gave Tai Yu a vigorous slap which almost knocked off his glasses. It was Wang Feng-chuan and, angry though she seemed, she took his hand coquettishly as she continued, "Wang Hsiao-yen has really turned your head, hasn't she? You can't stand not seeing her for a single day, can you? Well, let me tell you that if you continue to go on like this, you're finished!"

Hanging his head, Tai Yu muttered, "Give a dog a bad name. . . ." His one thought was to slip away, but after giving him another slap on the face she seized his arm and pushed him into the courtyard.

"You swine! I saw through you long ago, you ninny, you! You've handed in faked reports and messed everything up. Now because you're afraid of me, you want to clear out. . . . Well, that's not going to be so easy!" She lowered her voice and once inside the house seemed milder. Her piercing, wanton eyes, still gleaming as balefully as a sharp sword, sent a shiver through Tai Yu. Making him sit by her on the couch, she resumed, "You needn't think, because you've estranged Lin Tao-ching and Wang Hsiao-yen, and tightened your hold upon Wang Hsiao-yen, that you can rest satisfied. There's plenty more work to be done yet. In China students are harder to deal with than soldiers. We must be on the watch all the time, particularly against their efforts to organize themselves. Just now you left before I'd finished. Here are your orders: Get to work on that 'fiancée' of yours and make her join our 'Communist Party'. She's to make friends with Lin Tao-ching again, to get information about the Reds in Peking University. Don't imagine that the reign of peace has begun, the Communist Party is certainly up to something at the university. Lin Tao-ching needs watching too. If you can get a list of names of the top Communists in Peiping, plus their addresses — even the name and address of one, for that matter — our chief will give you a big reward. A big reward, do you hear? Very well, then, you may go now!" She embraced him and rewarded him with a bewitching smile. Tai Yu rose, stiff as a log, and slowly withdrew.

Outside again in the dark lane with the wind in his face, he instinctively hunched up his shoulders and hugged himself. He coughed several times, as if something had stuck in his throat, and then hurried quickly off towards the main road. He loathed and feared Wang Feng-chuan, yet he could not leave her. Hsiao-yen's love was the last spark of light in his mean, corrupt soul, but even this spark was faint now. He who had ruined himself and many others was now ruining the girl he loved. . . .

With Hsiao-yen he became another man. A wretched slave in the presence of the gaunt woman spy, he became a quiet, dignified gentleman as soon as he saw Hsiao-yen. This evening his bulging eyes observed her honest distress, and he asked solicitously:

"I believe you've lost weight the last few days, dear. Is anything troubling you?"

Hsiao-yen blushed and smiled as she answered casually:

"No, nothing. I don't know why, but I don't feel as keen on politics as I used to. Some progressives are looking at me queerly. . . ."

"Well, it's wrong to feel like that," rejoined Tai Yu calmly. "Petty-bourgeois intellectuals are notoriously unsteady, always wavering. Some revolutionaries whom you have respected may suddenly drop out of the movement or become counter-revolutionaries. Isn't your old friend Lin Tao-ching a case in point? But cheer up, Hsiao-yen. The Party is going to accept you as a member."

"What's that?" she cried, startled. "Chun-tsai, what's that you're saying?"

He put her hand to his lips and kissed it fervently, resting his sallow, bloated face next to her tender cheek. Closing his eyes as if in ecstasy, he murmured, "Dearest, you're a member of the vanguard of the world proletariat! We are fighting side by side now. . . ."

"Fighting side by side!" There were both joy and pain in Hsiao-yen's voice. She was silent for a long time.

Late that night when it was nearly time to part, he took her by the arm and murmured:

"Hsiao-yen, if you miss Lin Tao-ching — I know how much you meant to each other—why not go and make it up with her?"

When Hsiao-yen did not answer, he continued, "But while being friendly be vigilant, and report to the leadership in good time what she says and does and whom she meets. You can report to the leader of your group — you'll be a member of the Party branch at Peking University." He paused, but when Hsiao-yen did not speak, he said gravely: "One of our Party principles is that a Communist mustn't let personal feelings interfere with his work. You must go and make it up with Lin Tao-ching in order to find out about her counter-revolutionary activities. I can tell you that she's been secretly in touch with the special agent Hu Meng-an for some time. You knew he was in love with her and chasing her, didn't you?"

"Hu Meng-an?" Hsiao-yen started with revulsion at the mention of his name. "But she hates him! Impossible. . . ."

"Not a bit of it! You really haven't grasped the principles of dialectical materialism at all!" He dropped Hsiao-yen's hand and knitted his brows sternly. "You don't understand the first thing about Marxism. Your head is so full of petty-bourgeois illusions and rightist opportunism. The leadership has decided that tomorrow you're to go and look up Lin Tao-ching, who is said to be still active at the Peking University. From now on you will take instructions from Comrade Wang Chung of the History Department. Under his leadership you must take an earnest, conscientious part in the struggle at the university."

After Tai Yu went away, Hsiao-yen sat down feeling thoroughly disturbed and confused.

"Heavens, what can this mean?" she uttered. "What can it mean? It's like a dream, utterly fantastic. How can I ever speak to her again?"

She pictured Tao-ching's face, swollen and bleeding after she had been thrown down the stairs. Worse still, that had been the work of Wang Chung, Monkey-face Wang from whom she was now to take orders.

Joining the "Communist Party", far from making Hsiao-yen happy, brought with it a sense of bitterness that she could hardly define. Somehow she was gradually being separated from the people she liked and involved with those she distrusted. Although she was seated at her desk, her mind was too disturbed to concentrate on reading. She opened a drawer and took out a letter which Tao-ching had sent her that day, for she could not resist reading it once again. Something had prevented her from showing this letter to Tai Yu. Several times she had been on the point of mentioning it, but her deep-rooted friendship with Tao-ching had prevented her. The letter read:

Dear Hsiao-yen,

No matter how much you dislike or fear me, I still love you and believe in you because we grew up together. You were my dearest friend, whom I trusted implicitly. Whenever I was in trouble you came to my rescue. So I cannot forget you, I shall never forget you.

Dear Hsiao-yen, please believe what I'm going to say, because I care for you I am telling the absolute truth: You have been taken in! Cheng Chun-tsai is a vicious cheat who has been deceiving you all along. He is a scoundrel posing as a gentleman. Yet because you believe in him you have broken with me. And now you're going steadily down a most dangerous road. . . . Hsiao-yen, it's not your coldness

> that upsets me, all your friends who care so much and expected so much of you are most distressed because you're keeping such bad company. I know you won't believe me because you're blinded by love. But you have good judgement — just try to size things up dispassionately. Watch carefully what't going on, and think things over thoroughly; then little by little you'll understand that you've taken the wrong road. When that happens, no matter when that day comes, when you're in trouble and realize what you've done, I shall still be your friend, your firm friend. Then you must come to me! Dear Hsiao-yen, do come! And come soon! I shall always be waiting for you.

This warm, confident letter had made Hsiao-yen forget Tai Yu's allegation that Tao-ching was a spy and had moved her to tears. But a moment later, when she was composed enough to give the matter serious thought, she threw the letter back into the drawer. "Cheat? Who's a cheat?" She laughed bitterly. For she still had more faith in Tai Yu than in Tao-ching. "How low she's sunk, yet she says I'm the one who's taken a dangerous road. . . ." muttered Hsiao-yen, her heart wrung with pain. If what Tao-ching said was true, then Tai Yu . . . no, she dared not contemplate that possibility. No wonder that when she saw Tai Yu she was too worried and upset to feel any enthusiasm even on being told that she was to be admitted to the "Party".

Chapter 34

The evening after Chiang Hua's visit Tao-ching, who now had a new plan of action, took Hou Jui to a meeting of the Esperanto Club. In a fair-sized classroom in the Red Building they found about three dozen young people, mostly Peking University students. Conspicuous among those dark young heads were two grey-headed men who appeared to be professors. Tao-ching was not the only one to be surprised — Hou Jui's wide-set eyes blinked in astonishment too.

They came with an introduction, so their presence did not strike anyone as strange. When everybody was seated, a student closed the door. The dim lights shone down on tense, expectant faces and all was still. The meeting did not seem like a class, because no lecturer was on the platform; nor did it seem like a social, as everyone was sitting at a desk. After a brief silence, a fair-complexioned student in his early twenties, Han Lin-fu, rose to his feet.

"Has everyone brought notes and reading material?" he asked.

There was a rustling sound as notes and material in Esperanto were put on the desks. Nobody, however, paid any attention to them — they were watching Han Lin-fu or glancing at each other's eyes. Their grave and excited expressions seemed to Tao-ching to be out of place at an academic meeting like this. . . . She glanced interrogatively at Hou Jui beside her, but he ignored her. His eyes were fixed thoughtfully on Han Lin-fu, who now began to speak as if quite accustomed to conducting a meeting.

"We've received requests from a good many of our members, who find it hard to dig into the alphabet, that before studying Esperanto some time should be given to a discussion of current events and the crisis which is exercising all our minds. In view of this general request, shall we make a start along those lines today?"

Cries of approval burst from the young people, as raising their hands they shouted:

"Hear, hear!"

"Fine! Go ahead!"

The professor with the grey beard exchanged a glance with his slightly younger colleague in spectacles, and both of them smiled.

Han Lin-fu signalled for order and went on calmly:

"Very good. Since you're all in favour, we'll start our discussion now. To facilitate matters, we suggest a topic that's on our minds today — 'Which Way Shall We Take?' How about it?"

"Splendid! . . ." Another burst of wild applause was quickly silenced by Han Lin-fu, who glanced at the professor with glasses and announced:

"To give you time to collect your ideas, shall we ask Professor Chen of the Economics Department to introduce the subject? . . ."

A faint sigh of anticipation and long-repressed frustration could be heard, but by the time Professor Chen stood up and started speaking in a voice none too loud, you could have heard a pin drop.

The professor spoke naturally, well and to the point.

"Past history and present, in China as well as abroad, show us that a great nation can always find a way out. But what way out have the Chinese people today? The Northeast has been occupied for four years; northern China is as good as lost; the puppet regime up in Changchun is whipping up a big fanfare, and a new set of puppets has suddenly appeared nearer home. Before we can forget the May the Seventh Massacre and all the other days of national humiliation, the enemy has forged new chains to slip round our necks. The common people of China, groaning and struggling on the verge of starvation, have been goaded to desperation. Every man is bound to ask himself: Where are we heading? . . ."

Professor Chen, a rather slight man of forty or so, was a lucid speaker who had fully captured his hearers' attention. Although Tao-ching was busy watching the students' expressions, she, too, was gripped by the forcefulness with which he spoke. After a glance at Hou Jui and the other young people she settled down to listen in earnest.

"There are two quite different ways open to China: the way the common people want and the way the upper crust and bigwigs want. These two ways are diametrically opposed. First, to set the ball rolling, let me analyse what the bigwigs want.

"The bigwigs have several ways, and although they all come to the same conclusion they are based on different theories. Let me enumerate the chief of these.

"One is pessimism — they say China is past saving, that peace negotiations will mean the ruin of the country, and so will war. If resistance and capitulation both end in ruin, why trouble to resist?

"Another is defeatism — they have no faith at all in China's victory. Because our planes and guns aren't as good as the enemy's, they conclude that China could not possibly win. They fail to see the strength of the people and to understand that, in a war of national liberation, it is not planes nor guns but men who determine the outcome. Dr. Hu Shih is a spokesman for this school. The pessimists declare that ruin awaits the country, but Dr. Hu Shih tries to fool people by saying, 'Though a truce in North China won't make the enemy give back one inch of the Northeast, at least it will stop them from occupying any more. . . .' This line has been thoroughly debunked by events, but he's still peddling — at bargain prices — his theory: Resistance means defeat; if we don't resist, all may end well.

"The third theory is capitulationism. The capitulationists believe they can get on good terms with the imperialists and have co-operation between the peoples of eastern Asia; so they are prepared to sell the country outright. . . ."

By now the eyes fixed on Professor Chen were smouldering with anger as if he were a traitor ready to sell the country. The moment he stopped speaking, dozens of arms shot up and the students clamoured to be heard. Seeing this, Professor Chen smiled and sat down. Then one speaker after another, their faces red with indignation or white with anger, denounced the Kuomintang policy of capitulation. When finally a lad with a boyish face rose to speak, the classroom became silent. In a low but powerful and stirring voice, he challenged the company, "Are Peiping and Tientsin still Chinese territory or not? Look, friends, and listen to those planes with red blobs on their wings that are droning over our heads all day long! More than a thousand *mou* of land near the Tientsin race-course have been turned into an air-field by the Japanese. Tunghsien isn't the only place to have recently set up a puppet anti-Communist 'autonomous' government; the whole of Hopei is swarming with Japanese troops, equipped ready for combat, who are charging all over the province. . . . What are we to do? What way out is there for us? Shall we wait for the enemy to come and butcher us? Just wait to be slaves? . . ."

The lad stirred his hearers so deeply that even the grey-haired professor, who had been listening but had not spoken, found tears welling up in his eyes. Tao-ching stole another glance at Hou Jui and found that phlegmatic youth pink with emotion too.

"No, we must stand up and fight back!" the lad shouted, shaking his fist. "We must be masters, not slaves!" Having brought the feelings of the meeting to boiling-point, he sat down.

The classroom, reserved for a talk on Esperanto, had turned into a battleground to declare war on reaction and Japanese imperialism. When Tao-ching and Hou Jui left and walked away down the chilly road, their hearts were still burning. First they exchanged glances in silence. Then Tao-ching asked casually:

"Who was the last speaker, the one with the face like a boy?"

"A third-year history student. Li Shao-tung, I think his name is. He spoke well, didn't he?"

"With plenty of fire — he said what was in everybody's heart."

"That's right." Hou Jui hugged his shoulders because of the cold and wanted to say more but thought better of it.

As they walked on, the road grew so dark that neither could see the other's face distinctly.

"Who organized that meeting?" asked Tao-ching. "Were there any Party members?"

Hou Jui walked a few steps further before replying:

"No, there weren't any Party members. But some of them may once have been in our Party. Han Lin-fu is very progressive. He takes the initiative in the Esperanto Club and often arranges discussions like the one today."

"Hou Jui!" Tao-ching stopped to brush back the hair blowing on her face, then asked him softly, "Did you see anything wrong with this meeting today?"

He halted in surprise. "Wrong? I thought they all spoke pretty well."

"That's not the point. Did they answer the question: Which Way Shall We Take? They were angry and bitter all right, but they had no solution for the problem. All their talk went no further than denunciation. They still had no idea which way to take."

Hou Jui fell silent as if he had not heard her or were turning the matter over painfully in his mind. Suddenly he quickened his pace and called over his shoulder with a smile, "Let's go to the New Latinized Written Language Association tomorrow. So long!" He turned into an alley and was lost to sight.

Tao-ching stood looking after him and sighed before hurrying off herself.

The meeting the next evening was very much a repetition of the one on Esperanto. The New Latinized Written Language Association, too, was just a screen to fool the enemy. As the situation deteriorated in North China, the students had come to use clubs like this as a forum to condemn the crimes of the Japanese aggressors and the Kuomintang, and to vent their frustration. But, just as at the other meeting, they simply called for resistance without putting forward any specific proposals for overcoming the enemy. In view of this, Tao-ching asked Hou Jui to her lodgings that evening to have a long, serious talk. Chiang Hua's advice and what she had now seen of the strength of the students enabled her to take a firmer stand.

"About that meeting yesterday evening, Hou Jui," she said. "Why couldn't such keen patriots produce any specific answer to the question: Which Way Shall We Take?"

She had been prepared for a heated argument, but to her surprise Hou Jui was ready with his reply and said calmly:

"I want to thank you, Lu Fang. You needn't say any more. I've been guilty of conservatism, or empiricism. . . . All this time I've been behaving as if this were still last year or the year before, when the White terror was at its worst and public morale was so low."

Overjoyed by this change in him, Tao-ching seized his arm and cried:

"Good for you, Hou Jui! Now I'm sure things will liven up in the university!"

Hou Jui smiled and with the same composure rejoined:

"Thanks to you, Lu Fang, thanks to the Party and the masses. I'd no idea there were so many lone fighters in this university where reaction seemed rampant. I knew the students were upset about the crisis and that some activists were doing what they could, but I didn't link this with the whole situation. I underestimated their strength, and that's why our work made no headway." He sighed and said no more.

Tao-ching's face was grave and she looked at him thoughtfully.

"I think Party work that isn't linked with the masses is like grass without roots — it can't live or flourish, but a mass movement without Party leadership is like a bird without a head — it can never get anywhere. I didn't full grasp this till that meeting of the Esperanto Club. Do you agree, Hou Jui?"

Hou Jui stared at her in a strangely abstracted way and then burst out:

"I know what to do, Lu Fang! We must rally all those lone fighters and activists round us and give them jobs to do. Through them we'll organize a majority of students in every class. Once the Party is linked like that with the strength of the masses, those fascists won't stand a chance. At the next election of the student association we'll have each class in our hands, then there'll be no problem over the university association."

"He's no fool — he just wouldn't take the initiative before," thought Tao-ching, noting the intelligence and enthusiasm shining in Hou Jui's eyes. She told him eagerly, "Hou Jui, you

know conditions here and the best steps to take. If you arouse and win over one class after another, the result is bound to be different this time. All we need do is stir up the students, find out what's on their minds, and encourage and guide them. Once all the students stand up, there'll be no fear of the fascists."

Hou Jui nodded and laughed. This was the first time they had seen eye to eye about the work. This was also the first night that Tao-ching was able to sleep soundly since coming to Peking University.

Chapter 35

Li Huai-ying had just got up one morning and was about to go to the library, as she had no classes that day, when a graceful, well-dressed girl with big eyes and broad cheek-bones came running in high-heeled shoes into her room.

"So you're up!" she cried, taking Huai-ying's hand. "Come with me to the station. Hurry!"

"Why, Mei-shuang, what's the matter?" countered Huai-ying slowly with a smile.

Huang Mei-shuang took a telegram out of her rose-coloured handbag. "Don't be so dense, my uncrowned queen!" she cried. "Just look at this!" She was an impetuous, strong-willed girl with sharp eyes and a ready tongue.

Huai-ying read the telegram and beamed at her friend.

"At last, Mei-shuang, the one you've been longing for day and night is coming. Yes, I'll gladly go to the station with you to welcome him." With a ripple of laughter she poked her little finger into Mei-shuang's soft white cheek, and the other giggled too. So the two girls, each wearing a handsome fur coat, took rickshas to Chienmen Station. On the way, Mei-shuang turned her head to tell Huai-ying:

"After his graduation from the Imperial University in Tokyo, Liu Wen-wei wrote that he'd be back soon. Somehow his return's been postponed again and again. I really don't know what's been keeping him so busy. At eleven last night I got this telegram saying his boat had arrived at Chinwangtao and that he'd reach Peiping by train at 10:15 this morning. Why, it must be almost ten now. . . ." She consulted her watch. "Only thirty-eight minutes before the train is due in! I had two classes this morning but I cut them. Honestly, now that he's here, nothing else means anything to me!" She smiled back at Huai-ying, then abruptly stamped the footboard with her high-heeled shoes and urged the ricksha-man in a husky voice, "Hurry! Hurry! The train will be in soon."

While the two girls were still some distance from the station they saw that trouble was afoot. As they proceeded they realized that black-uniformed policemen were cracking and brandishing vicious-looking whips, like dark brown snakes above the noisy crowd. People were milling about to get out of the way. Women and children were crying, and everybody was shouting. And the police were bellowing above the din: "Out of the way! Into the waiting-room! Martial law is now in force in this area."

Passers-by made off as fast as they could, and hundreds of intending passengers with their bundles and cases were hustled into the waiting-room. There weeping women and children sought a corner in which to hide themselves. Workers, peasants, clerks, petty officials, and pot-bellied merchants alike, were puzzled and afraid. "What is happening?" they wondered. "Is someone important arriving?" They exchanged frightened and inquiring glances. The two girls entered the station with the milling crowd, and Mei-shuang, stepping confidently as if nothing were the matter, drew her friend to the ticket-office. A rude shock was in store however — a whip circling over their heads almost came down on her shoulder. Staring angrily at a young policeman with her big, black eyes she demanded:

"What do you think you're doing?"

The policeman, scowling, raised his whip higher to strike again, when he saw that these were not villagers or poor pedlars but two well-dressed young ladies of good family, and his raised hand dropped.

"Sorry!" he said with a shamefaced smile. "It's martial law. Please go into the waiting-room."

Mei-shuang and Huai-ying looked at the waiting-room, usually empty but now packed with people who were jostling each other to get away from the entrance, while fresh crowds were being herded in by policemen with whips.

Mei-shuang arched her pencilled eyebrows and remarked with disdain:

"It's filthy in there. The place stinks. Let's not go in, Huai-ying, but stay by the exit. These policemen are brutes, but they won't dare touch us. Who on earth can be arriving? . . ." She glared at another policeman with a raised whip.

A few moments later the whole place became utterly quiet, as still as the depth of a bitter winter night. The whips had disappeared and the police were now holding white batons. They ranged themselves in two orderly rows from the platform to the square outside, forming a "guard of honour".

A locomotive whistle sounded several times and a train pulled into the station.

The police stood in respectful silence, reinforced now by a group of grey-uniformed gendarmes. The station was ominously quiet, almost as if an emperor were expected.

When the train pulled in, the anxious crowd herded together like cattle muttered curiously:

"Let's see what big shot's coming."

"Even Ho Ying-chin* wasn't met like this when he came to Peiping."

"Not even the Generalissimo would be."

The caustic comments passed around the stuffy, foul-smelling room were interrupted by loud knocking on the window-pane. A middle-aged officer, flourishing his pistol, barked at the people inside:

"The friendly army is arriving. Stop talking! Anyone who dares to talk will be dragged out and shot."

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* Chairman of the Peiping Branch of the National Military Council under the Kuomintang.

"The friendly army?"

"What friendly army?"

People lowered their eyes. Like blighted plants, all hung their heads in bitterness.

Then a strange scene was enacted on Chinese soil.

Group after group of short, stocky, jack-booted Japanese soldiers with red epaulets alighted from the train and swaggered past. Group after group they came, all fully armed, with machine-guns, rifles on their shoulders, glittering sabres in their hands, very different from the arms of the Chinese gendarmes and police who were supposed to "protect" them. The black-uniformed police had only small white batons, the grey-uniformed gendarmes only pistols which hung from their belts. As the Japanese troops strode like conquerors past the shrinking Chinese guards, the "prisoners" in the waiting-room caught their breath and stared uneasily at those red epaulets and the Japanese flag with the round red blob in the centre. Indignation and bewilderment in their eyes, they were asking themselves "Whatever next? Without firing a single shot, the Japanese have occupied our Northeast, and now Peiping, this ancient capital with centuries of civilization behind it, is it, too, about to fall without protest?"

Huai-ying and Mei-shuang had finally been forced to the door of the waiting-room. They too were alarmed when the Japanese marched by and unconsciously pressed back. Mei-shuang had less aversion now to the stuffy room, but she still covered her mouth and nose with her handkerchief and used her handbag as a fan. Huai-ying was disgusted by the foul air too, but unlike her friend she frowned at the smug Japanese and felt an intolerable constriction in her heart. The reason why they had been herded here was now clear: to make way for the "friendly army". A low murmur swelled into a hubbub of protest.

"What's going on? What's to be done? With all these Japanese soldiers arriving, is there any hope for Peiping?"

"Don't you know that northern China is going to have

'autonomy'? Ho Ying-chin came to Peiping to auction it off."

"Confound him! He treats the Chinese people as dirt, and honours the Japs as if they were his ancestors."

"Don't you know, you swine, that this is Chinese territory, not your confounded island? Next thing there'll be target practice in Changan Street, I suppose."

"What the devil are you shouting about? You want to die?"

In the crowd were people who were really indignant, and others who were indifferent, simply waiting to get away, but the majority were fuming and swearing. A gendarme came up to the window. This time, because the Japanese were passing, he did not curse the crowd loudly but glared at them and hissed, "Silence there!"

But there was no silence in the waiting-room. In the general hubbub, many who did not know each other began to talk together in lowered voices. Huai-ying was watching the endless columns of Japanese soldiers pass by when she felt a tap on her shoulder. Turning her head, she saw another student from Kiangsi, Teng Yun-hsuan of the Chinese Literature Department. He was shaking his perspiring head and repeating, "Never heard of such a thing! Preposterous! . . . Why are you here, Huai-ying?"

Indicating Mei-shuang, Huai-ying answered, "To keep her company. She's expecting somebody. Why are you here, Old Teng?"

"To meet an aunt coming from the Northeast." Pressing his spectacles against the bridge of his nose he whispered, "I know you are well informed, Beauty Queen. What does the arrival of all these Japanese soldiers mean?"

Huai-ying shook her head and smiled absently. "How should I know? But I've heard that northern China will become a second Northeast. Don't you read the newspapers?"

"No," replied Teng with an embarrassed smile. He was one of the students who buried themselves in books. "What's the use of reading the papers? It only depresses you."

Mei-shuang, disturbed by Liu Wen-wei's failure to show up, was staring vacantly at those red epaulets and bright helmets, without really thinking about what was happening. Her fiancé, the son of a wealthy comprador, had studied with her at Futan University in Shanghai. When he went to Japan for further studies she came to Peiping and entered the Catholic University. For three years she had been eagerly waiting to marry this son of a big capitalist. He had studied political science in Japan, she was sure he would be active in political circles after his return and they would have a happy and comfortable home. She would furnish it not in the Japanese but in the Western style. . . . But he had not come. Mei-shuang was blaming the Japanese for filling the train he had meant to take, when she caught sight of a familiar figure walking in the middle of the endless stream of troops. At sight of him her eyes almost popped out of her head.

"Huai-ying!" she gasped, without turning. "He's come!" And she darted towards him so quickly that the gendarmes could not stop her.

Liu Wen-wei, in smart, well-pressed Western clothes, was surrounded by a dozen or so Japanese in the uniform of high-ranking officers or in Western-style civilian dress. Mei-shuang put on a spurt and flew to his side, catching hold of his coat.

"Wen-wei, Wen-wei! At last!" She panted, smiling her most enchanting smile. Liu Wen-wei halted in surprise, while even the Japanese with him stopped to stare at the attractive Chinese girl who stood in their way. "Wen-wei, I've been waiting so long! You — you —" She looked at the Japanese with him and began to feel rather nervous.

Liu Wen-wei's clean-cut oblong face showed some confusion at being accosted like this. He nodded to Mei-shuang casually and then hastened to say a few words to a Japanese in civilian clothes. The latter smiled, baring gold teeth, and nodded to the girl. Liu looked relieved. He dropped back with Mei-shuang. They talked in low voices as they left the station in the wake of the Japanese.

Huai-ying, still in the waiting-room, was entirely forgotten. It worried her to see Mei-shuang walk out with a group of Japanese, but when she tried to slip out herself the policemen barred the way. She had to stay where she was with the other Chinese. Teng Yun-hsuan kept up a steady flow of chatter during this anxious time of waiting.

"Have you seen Lin Tao-ching recently?" he asked earnestly. "The last few days she's looked me up several times, and how she's talked! I can't help feeling sorry for her, you know, wearing such thin clothes in this cold. A few years ago when that scoundrel was after her I was sorry for her too. You helped her then, didn't you?" He shook his head compassionately.

"You're just a book-worm!" Huai-ying turned to him with a faint smile. "She's not so lonely and forlorn as you suppose. She has purpose, she has brains. They are opposing. . . ." She jerked her head in the direction of the last batch of Japanese soldiers leaving the station. "All a simpleton like you can do is quote from the classics. You're even more muddle-headed than I am."

Teng nodded repeatedly, as if he had suddenly grasped what she meant. "You're right, you're right! You've called me to my senses." Then he whispered, "She's a Red, isn't she? Good Heavens!" He closed his eyes, shook his head and smiled with a mixture of pleasure and alarm, while Huai-ying winked to stop him.

By about twelve o'clock all the Japanese troops who had come to garrison Peiping had left the station. Only then were the hapless Chinese passengers released from the waiting-room, baggage-room and other places of confinement to continue on their way.

"Come on, let's go. We've served our 'sentence'." Huai-ying patted Teng on the shoulder and pulled him along in the stream of people struggling to get away. "When I see Mei-shuang I shall settle scores with her!" she muttered.

Although Huai-ying resented the way Mei-shuang had left her to go off with the Japanese, that same evening she let her friend take her into strange company, company that was quite new to her.

The luxurious hall was full of coloured lights, rich carpets, rare *objets d'art* and precious antiques. The people who assembled there struck Huai-ying as being very strange. Their fur-lined satin robes and jackets were covered with floral designs, some wore mandarin caps topped with red knots just like the bigwigs of the Ching Dynasty. More than a dozen men dressed in this fashion entered and were followed by richly-dressed, voluptuous women whose approach was heralded by heavy wafts of perfume. Then came the "guests of honour", the Japanese, at whose arrival the whole roomful of old gentlemen and ladies rose in a body in respectful silence.

These were the same arrogant Japanese officers who had strutted out of Chienmen Station that morning. They were still wearing their red epaulets and shining sabres. Accompanied by interpreters dressed like Liu Wen-wei in Western clothes, they marched into the splendid hall in orderly formation, their heads high. Huai-ying and Mei-shuang, who were sitting in a corner half hidden by a purple silk curtain, had to stand up too, when all rose in silence to welcome the new arrivals. Huai-ying pulled at the sleeve of her friend's velvet gown and whispered, pouting:

"I wouldn't have come if I'd known. This is all your fault. . . ."

"I didn't know they'd be here," protested Mei-shuang, glancing and arching her eye-brows at the Japanese who were still filing in. "Wen-wei didn't tell me. . . ." She pulled Huai-ying's skirt and added, "Never mind. All the world's a stage. Let's join the ladies and go through with it."

"Not I!" said Huai-ying, straightening her dress. She was wearing a light green cardigan with open-work designs and a dark green serge skirt. With her fair complexion, regular features and lightly waved black hair, she looked lovelier by far than the whole crowd of these over-dressed women.

"Who's that old man with the beard? The one who seems to be host. What's his name?" she asked impatiently.

"Wang — Wang Yi-tang, I think. That fat man is Kao Ling-wei. The other fat one in dark glasses is Wan Fu-lin. The rest I don't know. Why doesn't Wen-wei come and look after us?" Just as she said this, Liu Wen-wei, freshly groomed, approached them. He saluted Huai-ying with a deep bow, Japanese style.

"Pardon me, Miss Li! Will you come and join our honoured guests?" He bowed again, his sleek hair reflecting the lights.

Without waiting for Huai-ying's reply, Mei-shuang took her by the arm and walked gracefully after her fiancé to join the crowd.

There were more than a dozen big round tables in the hall, each was covered with a snow-white table-cloth, with a vase of hot-house roses in the centre. The ladies and high officials in satin robes mingled with the Japanese and their interpreters who took their places at the different tables. Liu Wen-wei put Huai-ying and Mei-shuang at two separate tables.

Both guests and hosts were rather formal at the start of the banquet. Wang Yi-tang, Kao Ling-wei and the other hosts contented themselves with filling their guests' cups and begging them with humble bows to drink. The high-ranking Japanese officers sat eating condescendingly and gravely. Although some seductive Chinese ladies made eyes at them and poured out wine for them with their snow-white hands, these self-styled "masters of Eastern Asia" remained seated with eyes front and chests out, as if impervious to feminine charm.

"They behave decently enough," thought Huai-ying, as she perched on the edge of her chair and looked uneasily at the people around her. She was acutely uncomfortable, being unable to forget that she was a Chinese. The arrogance with which the Japanese carried themselves naturally made her feel indignant and humiliated. Yet when she recalled Mei-shuang's words, "All the world's a stage," she smiled. There was no need to take it so seriously. It couldn't do any harm to stay for a while. So she remained in spite of her uneasiness.

"We are deeply grateful to you for troubling to come so far to help China. . . ." Nodding respectfully, an old man at her table proposed a toast to the Japanese officers which roused Huai-ying from the tangle of her thoughts. Expressions of gratitude were rising thick and fast from every side, like a ghostly whirlwind raging through the hall. She could not repress a shudder.

A stocky Japanese major-general of about fifty rose slowly from his seat at the central table, smoothing his drooping moustache as he did so. He raised his glass, swept the room with lordly, condescending eyes, and solemnly uttered a few words in response. Liu Wen-wei, sitting by his side, in a clear baritone rendered his reply into Chinese.

"In accordance with the three cardinal principles laid down by our foreign minister Hirota," said he, "we have come to China to co-operate with you. These three principles are briefly: First, prohibit all anti-Japanese activities in China; secondly, establish a system of co-operation between Japan, China and Manchukuo; and thirdly, carry out a common anti-Communist policy. You gentlemen have a good reputation in China and are known for your competence and integrity. We sincerely hope that you will join hands with our army so that we can march forward together."

Applause neither enthusiastic nor noticeably cold ended the formalities of the evening. The hall became livelier as the tension relaxed, but Huai-ying, on the edge of her chair, grew more and more tense and found the atmosphere increasingly oppressive.

The Japanese officer who had been sitting gravely beside her without casting a single glance at her became animated after many rounds of wine. He began to nod politely to the ladies at the table, pressed wine and delicacies upon them and turned occasionally to glance at Huai-ying. The more he drank, the more his behaviour changed. The other Japanese officers were the same. As the air became hot and close and the room filled with the smell of wine, they removed their caps and sabres and began to pay attention to the women seated by them. The elderly hosts were entirely neglected and forgotten.

The officer next to Huai-ying soon had eyes for no other woman. Drinking glass after glass of brandy, he smiled suggestively, exposing all his gold teeth. He peeled an apple and offered it to her, saying softly in broken Chinese:

"Eat apple, miss. Your honourable name? Thanks. . . ."

Huai-ying flushed with embarrassment and did not know whether to accept or refuse. After a moment's hesitation she took the fruit and put it on the table, then went to look for Mei-shuang. Her friend was sitting at the major-general's table and he was speaking to her in Japanese, which Liu Wen-wei interpreted. Huai-ying tapped Mei-shuang impatiently on the shoulder. The other girl turned and took her hand, exclaiming:

"Isn't this fun, Huai-ying! Did you hear how fluently Wen-wei translated for them?" And before Huai-ying could speak, she turned to tell the major-general and the others, "This is the Queen of Peking University. Look at her! Isn't she beautiful?"

"What do you mean?" cried Huai-ying, red with anger. Before she could say more, the Japanese officer who had peeled the apple came over. Standing between the two girls, he pointed his raised thumb at Huai-ying and cried:

"Miss, beautiful queen — yes!"

Huai-ying could stand this no longer. She went to the cloakroom for her coat and walked off without telling Mei-shuang that she was leaving. She had not gone very far along the deserted street when a car overtook her. It screeched to a stop and a man jumped out — the same Japanese officer. Drunk and reeking of liquor, he let out a savage laugh and, without a word, pulled the shrieking girl into the car, which drove straight off. Night closed in and once more the deserted street was quiet.

Chapter 36

A full week passed.

Hou Jui called on Tao-ching so early one morning that she had only just got out of bed when he arrived. The moment he entered, he took her hand and cried:

"I've good news for you! Several departments have organized a students' self-governing association!" He was almost stammering in his excitement.

"Really? How many departments?" asked Tao-ching rather sceptically.

"The Chinese, Geography, Economics and English Departments! All the associations are in the hands of progressives." With a smile Hou Jui sat on Tao-ching's bed, and rubbed his cheeks which were red with cold. "Rouse the masses, show them why they're so depressed and point the way forward — that's the experience we've gained from the last few days' work. The advice you gave us was very valuable."

"But what about the science and engineering students?" demanded Tao-ching, looking him in the eyes. "And the History Department, the hardest fortress to storm?"

The smile on Hou Jui's face disappeared and for some minutes he did not answer.

"The science and engineering students are too absorbed in their laboratory work and formulae," he said at length. "It's not so easy to make them put aside their books and experiments to take part in political activities. Still, I'm glad to say a number of students in the Chemistry, Physics and Biology Departments are on the move and are drawing closer to us. I don't think there will be much difficulty in getting them to organize self-governing associations."

"But, Hou Jui, we mustn't make the same mistake as before," warned Tao-ching in a low voice as she sat on a stool. "The student association — the organization of a new unified students' self-governing association for the whole university — has a close bearing on the future development of the whole student movement here, and will determine whether the Party can lead the students or not to join in the movement to resist Japan and save the nation. So it's still a hard task we have ahead of us." Her voice had sunk even lower as she went on. It was evident that anxiety about the future overshadowed her

pleasure at this initial success. Hou Jui, well aware of this, continued:

"No, Lu Fang, I've good reason for saying it shouldn't be too difficult. First of all, a nucleus has been formed since our last talk — all our three Party members are now active. In the second place, the progressives, those who sympathize with the revolution and those who are patriotic and concerned about the fate of the country are going into action. Thirdly, the rank and file are ready to follow suit, thanks to the influence of the others and in the light of the new situation. By the way, I haven't told you. . . ." He chuckled and his large, wide-set eyes shone with delight. "Li Huai-ying has suddenly altered. She looked up Liu Li and told her, with tears, that she was determined to change her attitude and earnestly asked for help. She's come to hate the Japanese so bitterly that she grinds her teeth whenever she speaks of them. It was due to this change in her that the re-election in the English Department went so smoothly yesterday. That bookish Teng Yun-hsuan has also started to read the newspapers. At the meeting of the Chinese Literature Department he raised his hand for the first time in favour of a re-election."

"What made Li Huai-ying change so suddenly?" asked Tao-ching in surprise. "Has she been provoked — or what?"

"I've been asking myself the same question, but she hasn't explained it. You might go and have a talk with her."

"How is Wang Hsiao-yen?" Tao-ching forced herself to ask.

"Getting more depressed every day. Avoiding us all."

"Just wait, wait till the re-election in the History Department; then she'll see which side is in the right." While she was speaking Tao-ching realized that her feet were cold, and looked down to discover that she had been barefoot all this time. Laughing, she pulled on her stockings and continued:

"Thanks to you, Hou Jui, we're making headway at last. But the situation in northern China has become more critical, and we must have a Party meeting this evening to discuss how to carry on. Hsu Hui is coming to help us. She may even be able to attend tonight. Shall we meet at Liu Li's place?"

"Is Hsu Hui coming? Fine!" Hou Jui grinned. "Yes, let's meet at Liu Li's home. That's all right."

After Hou Jui left, Tao-ching quickly tidied up and did some reading before going out to begin all the complex tasks she had set herself that day. She was in charge not only of the work at Peking University but also that at the Sino-French University. She was also the Party contact for a few people outside of these two universities. That afternoon she called on Li Huai-ying and Teng Yun-hsuan. In fact, she spent the whole afternoon talking with them.

Night fell.

Five Party members met in Liu Li's small room, including Han Lin-fu and Mei Hui, both of whom had lost contact with the Party but been readmitted on the recommendation of a higher Party organization. Before the meeting started, Han Lin-fu was reading an article:

> Since Nanking was made the capital, the death of three hundred thousand young people has been reported in the papers, while the number of those missing or imprisoned is legion. Killing is not enough; victims are buried alive; and imprisonment always involves cruel tortures. They are making a hell on earth. . . . In the past it was a crime to be a "Red". Now it is a crime to violate the "good neighbour" policy. . . .

Han Lin-fu's voice, not high-pitched but full of feeling, combined with his lively eyes to hold the attention of all the others in the room. But he stopped, blinking, to observe, "It's very well written, this open letter to the Sixth Plenary Session of the Kuomintang Central Executive Committee. I don't know who wrote this, but it forcefully exposes the false democracy of the Kuomintang."

"I'm not so sure," countered Liu Li seriously. "I don't understand why we should demand democracy from the enemy. The Kuomintang bigwigs don't care a rap about the statements or appeals we poor students make. They still spend all their spare time cuddling their concubines."

"You haven't grasped the spirit of the *August the First Manifesto,* Liu Li," Hou Jui put in, narrowing his eyes. "Lu Fang's helped me to understand that it's not wrong to demand democracy from the enemy, for the simple reason that state power is still in their hands. This is what is new in the current policy of the Party. The Kuomintang has a high-sounding constitution — we must show that it's a sham. If they don't give us democracy, they'll be slapping their own faces. The manifesto of the ten colleges of Peiping and Tientsin is absolutely right and very strong."

"You two argue whenever you meet," broke in Wu Yu-ping, who had been very quiet. "Who do you think wrote this open letter? My guess is Huang Cheng of Tsinghua University. He's now the leader of the Student Federation of Peiping. They say he's able, determined and a very hard worker. He's the editor of that magazine *Dawn* which introduces dialectical materialism and is being so well received. The other day a student showed me one of his poems. It's so good that I've learned it by heart. Shall I recite it?"

"Yes, go ahead," said Liu Li. The room was growing warm, so she took off her well-worn blue padded jacket under which she wore a scarlet cardigan.

Wu Yu-ping produced a pen and notebook and jotted down the following lines as he recited:

The night is long, our path ahead is hidden;
The stars hang low, the longed-for dawn is late;
With shame I brood alone on tasks unfinished,
Yet firm in faith desire no better fate.
No more I cling to self or think of safety,
Here in the fight shall all my blood be shed;
Say not the way is long, dawn slow in coming;
Cocks crow, the sun is rising just ahead!

Hou Jui, Mei Hui and Han Lin-fu had gathered round Wu Yu-ping to hear this recitation, pitched in a low voice but charged with feeling. Liu Li poured them some water while she listened. The poem made a strong appeal to them all because it put their own feelings into words.

"'Cocks crow, the sun is rising just ahead!' That's a good line. It says what's in everybody's mind but no one has put into words," observed Liu Li, cup in hand, as Tao-ching and Hsu Hui came in.

Without formal greetings or unnecessary preliminaries the meeting of the Party branch began.

Hou Jui spoke a few words and then gave the floor to Tao-ching, who started in a low, deliberate voice:

"Comrades, the present situation is this: Following the establishment of the 'Eastern Hopei Anti-Communist Autonomous Government', the traitors are planning to set up the Hopei-Chahar Political Council. The danger to the country is increasing daily. This poses a new problem to our Party and to the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people. The *August the First Manifesto* points out that we must unite with all people that can be united with to fight Japan and stop the civil war in order to drive out the aggressors. That is why we must lose no time in arousing the people, who are the forefront of our national defence. Coming now to Peking University — the university which prides itself on the glorious tradition of the May the Fourth Movement — we see that she has fallen behind during the last couple of years. The Trotskyites, members of the C.C. clique and other reactionaries have been active. Conditions are beginning to improve but they are still far from satisfactory. Circumstances demand that we quickly devise ways and means to alter the situation. The time for decisive action has come and that is what we are here to discuss today. . . ."

Hsu Hui sat leaning against one corner of the wall. On her small, thin face was a faint smile of satisfaction. She was thinking, "It's only a few months since I last saw Tao-ching and yet she has become quite a different person. What a contrast between the way she talks today and her nervousness at the March the Eighteenth memorial meeting a few years ago, when she stood at the fringe of the crowd not even daring to shout slogans!" Meanwhile Tao-ching continued:

"Some news for you, comrades! Li Huai-ying, our beauty queen, has recently changed very much for the better. The cause is something disgraceful — she was raped, with the tacit consent of the chief traitors in Peiping, by an officer of the Japanese imperial army. We can well imagine her helpless fury and bitterness! Liu Li and I went to see her and told her that unless our whole society changed, no one could hope to live a decent life. Since then, she's been drawing closer to us. Her case is a proof that if we know how to guide them, the majority of the students will eventually join the revolution to save the nation."

Hsu Hui, surveying the group, spoke after Tao-ching:

"Comrades, both the domestic and international situations are favourable to our revolutionary struggle. The labouring masses of the oppressed nations of the world are rising up in heroic struggle for national liberation. The fight of the Abyssinians against Italy, and that of the Egyptians against Britain, have greatly encouraged our people. With regard to the internal situation, Comrade Mao Tsetung has triumphantly reached north Shensi, several units of the Red Army have joined forces, and the Party has issued its *August the First Manifesto* — all these factors have contributed enormously to advancing the revolution in China. The Party has, in addition, recently published an open letter to the people of northern China, calling upon them to rise in concerted action against aggression. With regard to the students, the student movement in Peiping, after a lull of four years, has taken a big stride forward. The manifesto of the ten colleges in Peiping and Tientsin has extended the scope of our activities and hastened the formation of the Student Federation of Peiping and Tientsin. In many universities and high schools the Party is making its influence felt. We are uniting the broad masses of the students, drawing them out step by step from the narrow confines of their studies, into the great movement to resist Japan and save China. Speaking of Peking University, I was a student there myself and know what persecution there has been. As a consequence of this persecution a large number of students became passive and buried their heads in their books, paying no attention to what was going on around them, but today the harsh facts are gradually awakening them. That is why we should do our best to give them guidance, unite them, and lead them out of their limited circle on to the sacred road of national liberation. The first step in this direction, I think, is the formation of a students' self-governing association. And we must exercise leadership in this association in order to co-ordinate with the student movement of the city as a whole."

Hsu Hui's bright, sharp eyes swept the face of each in turn and after a slight pause she continued, "But we must understand that our present slogan is: Fight for National Liberation. We mustn't make the mistake again of using ultra-left slogans which will scare away those who have little class consciousness. Our work in the past suffered tremendous losses because of wrong leadership. Now with Chairman Mao's correct leadership, things will naturally be quite different."

The others put forward views on how to smash the small groups of reactionaries in various classes, how to estimate the alignment of forces and how to strengthen the progressives. When finally the discussion touched on the re-election in the History Department, Wu Yu-ping produced a slip of paper and said with a smile:

"This is going to strip the masks off Wang Chung and the other reactionaries."

"What's that mysterious paper?" demanded Liu Li, trying to take it from him. But Wu Yu-ping drew back his hand, saying:

"This is top secret. I've had a hard time getting it. Now let me give it to Hou Jui who will use it as a weapon to fight the enemy."

"It's a receipt signed by Wang Chung acknowledging subsidies from the Kuomintang!" Hou Jui smiled, taking the slip. "A fine weapon, all right! But this by itself isn't enough, we've to prepare for a fierce battle."

"Let's see how that wretched Wang Hsiao-yen reacts to this!" Liu Li could not resist adding.

After a further discussion of specific measures to be taken in the coming struggle, the Party members left, excited and confident.

Tao-ching accompanied Hsu Hui. The night was cold and snow was beginning to fall.

"You're a pupil who's excelled your teacher, Tao-ching," said Hsu Hui. "I don't know why Old Chiang sent me here to help you. I can see you've made much faster progress than I have."

With an embarrassed smile Tao-ching replied:

"Don't say that, Hsu Hui. I'm far behind you. What with my lack of experience and ignorance, our work at Peking University wasn't getting anywhere until recently."

Hsu Hui grasped Tao-ching's hands with a smile and after a moment's silence said:

"A Communist will never rest on his laurels. Keep it up, Tao-ching, and before long Peiping will erupt like a volcano right in the heart of the enemy camp. We must go all out to prepare to light the fire."

Staring at Hsu Hui with grateful eyes, Tao-ching was warmed by an indescribable sense of comradeship.

Chapter 37

In the fading light of an early winter afternoon, Wang Hsiao-yen, some books under her arm, was walking listlessly towards her hostel. She was suddenly stopped by Tai Yu, bespectacled and in a cotton-padded gown of grey serge.

"Where are you going, Hsiao-yen?" he asked, a faint smile on his pasty face.

"Oh, it's you! Why haven't I seen you for a whole week?" Hsiao-yen's eyes opened wide, her face flushed and her heart pounded.

Tai Yu drew near and touched her hand as he asked, "Have you any time to spare now? I should like to have a talk with you."

"Shall we go to my room?" Hsiao-yen adjusted her glasses and looked at him eagerly.

"No, let's stroll through Peihai Park. We haven't been there for a long time."

Hsiao-yen nodded her agreement as Tai Yu took over her books, and they walked off side by side.

As it was winter, the park was deserted and dull. When they reached a pavilion, they sat down on a bench by the balustrade.

First observing that there was no one about, Tai Yu took Hsiao-yen's hand and kissed it; his prominent, lustreless eyes searched her sad, worried face.

"What's the matter, Hsiao-yen? You look more depressed every day. Why don't we get married at once? You'd feel better then. But you're so stubborn, so feudal in the way you cling to your chastity, I really don't know what to do with you! . . ."

"Don't talk nonsense!" protested Hsiao-yen. "I'm not a repressed old spinster yet, so why talk as if I were?" She smiled gently as she pushed away his hand and said softly, "I don't know why I've been feeling so low, Chun-tsai. Could you perhaps be mistaken about Wang Chung? I feel he's no good. He keeps running after girls, bullying people and even beating them up. . . . How can someone like that be a Communist? Really, I can't work under him!"

Grinding his heel in the withered grass, Tai Yu said moodily: "Wang Chung should be criticized, but that's how underground work is, Hsiao-yen. The leadership can't keep a very strict watch. . . . By the way, have you looked up Lin Tao-ching? How are you getting along with her now?"

"Don't talk about her!" cried Hsiao-yen petulantly. "She's not at the university now, so how can I look her up?" She could not have explained why she spoke like this. As a matter of fact, she had seen Tao-ching, though they had cut each other. "For your own sake, Chun-tsai, don't mention her any more! . . . I believe in you. . . ." She turned to stare blankly at the big lake, newly frozen over.

"You're wrong, Hsiao-yen. How can a Communist let personal feelings interfere with the work? Of course Lin Tao-ching is at the university. You can't fool me! She's not only at the university, I tell you, but has been pretty active. Some self-styled progressives are doing all they can to win over not only the backward students but girls like Li Huai-ying. Some people have been taken in by their hypocritical slogans and are calling for a united front to resist Japan and save China. I'm afraid Lin Tao-ching is behind this. Don't you see the harm they are doing? Can you really be so irresponsible as to let them deceive innocent young people?"

"I can't see what harm they're doing," muttered Hsiao-yen. "Chun-tsai, aren't you mistaken? I feel you're the one getting more and more confused. I long so much to be with you, yet I dread it too! It's a kind of mental torture! . . ." She bent her head to finger the hem of her jacket, and a large tear fell on his nicotine-stained fingers.

Both of them remained silent. Tai Yu lit a cigarette and puffed at it moodily, as he leaned back against a pillar. When he saw that the orange disk of the setting sun had half vanished behind the misty Western Hills, he threw away the stub of his cigarette and turned to look at Hsiao-yen, saying gloomily:

"I must warn you seriously, Hsiao-yen, that you're in a very dangerous state of mind. You have no political vigilance — you can't distinguish right from wrong — and you ignore Party discipline! If you go on like this, you'll ruin yourself. You must know that I've done all in my power to help you and protect you, yet now you start suspecting me! This is fantastic! All right, if you don't trust me, go to that renegade Lin Tao-ching and inform against me. What, after all, is the united front? An entirely mistaken, capitulationist policy. It's making overtures to the enemy, going cap in hand to the warlords, bureaucrats and capitalists. . . . These are the ideas peddled by Lin Tao-ching and her gang. How can you believe in such nonsense too, Hsiao-yen? That's why I say you're in a dangerous state."

Hsiao-yen had grown graver as she listened, completely convinced by the rebukes of her eloquent lover and political leader. Having heard him out attentively with bent head, she raised her eyes to reply:

"You know how inexperienced I am, Chun-tsai. It's only recently that I joined the revolution, so there are many problems I don't understand completely. Don't worry, though. From now on I'll do my best. . . ."

"That's fine!" Tai Yu took her hand and his lack-lustre eyes gleamed with cunning and self-satisfaction. Once again he had bent the meek, honest girl to his will. "Let's talk as we go," he suggested, taking her arm.

"Hsiao-yen, you must be on your guard against wrong ideas," he warned her as they strolled along the bank towards the back gate of the park. "We mustn't let them deceive and win over innocent students in the name of the National Anti-Japanese United Front. This plan to form students' self-governing bodies in every department is nothing but a plot of the reactionaries to grab power for themselves. You know all about it, I'm sure. So we must take a firm proletarian stand and fight all bourgeois ideas to the bitter end."

Hsiao-yen made no reply, deeply absorbed as she was in her own thoughts. But just before they reached the gate, she outstripped him and stepped aside under a tree.

"Come here a minute!" she called.

Tai Yu came up and stood beside her.

"Tell me honestly, Chun-tsai. . . . Do you really . . . truly love me?"

His protuberant eyes stared at her in amazement.

"What! Don't you trust me?"

Hsiao-yen bent her head and avoided his eyes, nervously toying with her handkerchief.

"I know there's a lot you hide from me."

"What?"

"You'll never tell me where you live, for one thing. You say you don't drink, yet I smell wine on your breath. And. . . ."

"And what?"

"More than once you've smelt of powder and perfume too. . . . Chun-tsai, if you love someone else, tell me straight out and I'll make no objections. . . ." Her face was as pallid as the frozen lake.

Tai Yu, as calm as ever, simply smiled. Patting her on the shoulder, he whispered:

"Don't be silly, you little bookworm! You've completely forgotten what sort of people we are — underground workers in the White areas! I have such heavy responsibilities that it's impossible for me to tell anyone where I live; besides, I never stay long in one place. This is a matter of discipline, an iron rule which nobody can break. That's why I can't tell even you where I live. You ought to understand this. As for the wine and cosmetics — really, Hsiao-yen, you are too naive! I have to work with other women comrades, besides you, darling. Sometimes, as camouflage, we pretend to be lovers and walk side by side. As for the smell of liquor, we sometimes pretend to be drunkards so as to fool the enemy. Can't you understand this, dear?"

Hsiao-yen smiled a rather forced, unhappy smile.

After they parted, she went home and found her father strolling in the courtyard. She glanced at him in distress and hurried towards her room. Professor Wang called after her in surprise:

"Hsiao-yen, Hsiao-yen! What's the matter?"

She stopped and made herself answer with a smile:

"Nothing, daddy. Have you read today's papers? Did you read Chiang Kai-shek's opening speech at the Fifth Plenary Session of the Kuomintang Central Executive Committee?"

"Yes, I did! Those scoundrels who are selling the country are trying to fool the people again with empty talk. They say, 'Until all hope of peace is lost, we shall never abandon peace; until the situation becomes desperate, we shall not talk lightly of making sacrifices.' Isn't the situation desperate enough yet? . . ." Carried away by his own eloquence, the professor fixed earnest eyes upon his daughter, but she was too preoccupied to embark on any discussion. Telling her father that she felt unwell, she went straight to her room.

On entering, she gave a start to see Yu Shu-hsiu seated in front of the dressing-table, combing her hair at the mirror. Catching sight of Hsiao-yen, the girl put down the comb and sprang up to embrace her.

"Hsiao-yen, you're back at last! I almost missed seeing you too! Do you know I'm going away tonight? I'm leaving Peiping."

"Where are you going?" Hsiao-yen took her hands. "Why haven't you been to see me all this time?"

Shu-hsiu caught Hsiao-yen by the arm and sat down with her on the edge of the bed.

"I was so busy with my school work and all the other things I had to do that I'd no time to visit friends. I haven't seen Tao-ching for a long time either. Have you seen much of her lately? . . . You want to know where I'm going? You'll never guess! The Party has agreed to my request — I'm to stop studying and go to a factory to work with the factory hands. Can you believe it? I'm going to be among workers!" Excitement had made her almost incoherent.

"Which factory are you going to? Where is it?" asked Hsiao-yen with a gentle smile. Shu-hsiu's arrival had cheered her up, helping her to forget her own troubles for a time.

Shu-hsiu winked and made a face, shaking her head.

"I can't tell you or anybody else," she cried. "The thing is, I'm going to join the ranks of the workers. I'm so happy!"

Hsiao-yen patted her shoulder and asked with another smile:

"Are your parents willing for you to give up your studies and your comfortable life at home to become a worker and put up with all sorts of hardships?"

"I'm not letting them know. I'm going to run away tonight, and they won't be able to find me. When I came to say goodbye and you weren't in, I was just going to phone you and ask you to come back when you saved me the trouble by turning up yourself! Hsiao-yen, no matter what work the Party gives me, I'll accept it gladly. I'm so very, very happy!"

The determination on Shu-hsiu's radiant face and her youthful enthusiasm warmed Hsiao-yen's heart and made her forget all the problems that had been weighing on her mind for days. Leaning closer to the attractive girl, she said with an affectionate smile:

"You're going to be a good revolutionary, my dear! I must follow your example."

All of a sudden, Shu-hsiu sprang to her feet and picked up the pretty red comb on the dressing-table. She came back to stand beside Hsiao-yen and said:

"You've nothing to learn from me, Hsiao-yen. You can learn from the friend who gave me this comb. Do you know who she was? Lin Hung! Before she went so bravely to her death, she gave me this comb; and since then, whenever I see it I think of her and feel as if I had wings, as if I suddenly had enormous strength. So whenever I meet with any difficulty, whenever anything happens to cross me, I take out this comb and comb my hair with it. Then I feel as if I were Lin Hung herself, afraid of nothing and upset by nothing. Now that I'm leaving home I can't help feeling sad—I'm my mother's only daughter, you know. She'll miss me so much when I'm gone, she'll be searching for me everywhere, crying all the time. That's why I was combing my hair so hard just now."

She had been smiling, but now she began to cry.

Hsiao-yen took Lin Hung's comb and stared at it till her eyes were wet too. To lessen the tension, she asked as she dried her tears:

"Are you leaving tonight by train, Shu-hsiu? . . . Is anyone seeing you off? Tell me, have you got a boy friend? . . . I'm sure he must be a lively, mischievous fellow!"

"No, I haven't!" Shu-hsiu shook her head vigorously. "I've no time for young men! But I haven't told you all I had on my mind. I'm sorry I shan't see Tao-ching before I go. You know how much I miss her. She's been keeping her whereabouts secret during the last few months, and I haven't had time to find out anything about her. Tell me, do you see her often? How is she? What is she doing? Has she been to visit you?"

Shu-hsiu chattered away without noticing how the colour was coming and going in Hsiao-yen's cheeks. But the latter's long silence began to worry her.

"Has anything happened to her, Hsiao-yen? . . ." Her face turned pale at the thought that Tao-ching must be in trouble again.

"She's all right," Hsiao-yen said coldly. "She's now attending classes in Peking University as an auditor."

"Then you must be together very often," cried Shu-hsiu gaily. "You must have been working together!"

Hsiao-yen felt tugged in opposite directions, and did not know what to do. She wanted to tell Shu-hsiu of Tao-ching's defection which had ended their friendship. . . . But how could she be sure that Shu-hsiu was not a renegade like Tao-ching? That she had not come here just to sound her out? . . . She decided it was best to remain silent.

Quick to notice Hsiao-yen's distress, Shu-hsiu observed shrewdly:

"Is something wrong between you and Tao-ching, sister? What is it? She's a fine person and you're her good comrade-in-arms. What could have come between you? Surely, nothing! No, that would be unthinkable. Do tell me what's happened to Tao-ching!"

Her naive sincerity allayed Hsiao-yen's suspicions. She plucked up courage enough to say solemnly:

"I think I must tell you, Shu-hsiu, that Tao-ching has deceived us — I could never have dreamed of such a thing — she turned renegade long ago and is a spy too. . . ."

She had been afraid Shu-hsiu would burst out crying or start abusing Tao-ching. To her surprise, however, nothing of the sort happened. In a flash, Shu-hsiu laid by her childish manner and became very calm and grave. Her lively big eyes fixed upon Hsiao-yen's sad face, she said in soft, measured tones:

"Are you sure you aren't making a mistake, Hsiao-yen? Are you sure someone hasn't deceived you? I was in the same cell as Tao-ching and we were released at about the same time. I know her. I could sooner believe the sky might fall on my head than believe that Tao-ching could turn renegade! The enemy know plenty of dirty tricks — haven't you let somebody impose on you? The die-hards like nothing better than to see us fight among ourselves, to stir up bad feeling among us."

"Don't say any more!" interrupted Hsiao-yen, her face pale and her voice feeble. "These days seem to be one long nightmare, my mind is so muddled. I feel like a little boat on a storm-swept sea, drifting from side to side. I can't stand it any longer! . . ." Hot tears rolled down her white cheeks as she threw herself on the bed and burst out weeping.

The facts were only too clear now, clear as a mountain in the sunlight. If Tao-ching were not a renegade but still risking her life to fight loyally for her country and her people, then Tai Yu, Cheng Chun-tsai, Hsiao-yen's first love, must be a shameless renegade, a vicious hypocrite or even worse. And she herself? How low had she sunk? Tao-ching's letter as well as many facts had already put this thought into her head. But she had never dared to consider it seriously. She had closed her mind to such a possibility because it was too fearful to contemplate. It would mean that her whole life was ruined, that never again could she face those whom she most respected, or those kindly people who had such high hopes of her.

Shu-hsiu had some inkling of what her friend was suffering. She stood beside her and gently lifted her head, her innocent eyes filled with love and concern for Hsiao-yen.

"Pull yourself together, sister! If you really believe in communism and will advance along the road pointed out by Marx and Lenin, not forgetting what our motherland and our people expect of you, then these dark clouds will pass. A river may twist and turn, but it flows at last into the sea. Once winter is past, spring can't be far behind. Pull yourself together, Hsiao-yen! Don't brood over the past! Tell me what's weighing on your mind."

"Dear Shu-hsiu!" Hsiao-yen dried her eyes and looked steadily at the girl. "I'll tell you this: I had too much trust in him, and him alone. And I've been too self-confident."

Chapter 38

Fired by patriotism, the students of Peking University were electing new self-governing associations. The fight, although a fierce one, went well. Even in the History Department they succeeded in wresting the leadership from the hands of a group of die-hards.

All the history students, over a hundred of them, met one afternoon in a large lecture room. Thanks to the spade-work put in by Hou Jui and others, they had agreed to elect a self-governing body for their department.

Hou Jui, the spokesman chosen by the fourth-year students, was the first to speak.

"Fellow students, this is a great occasion," he said. "A great occasion — the first time for three years that our freshmen, third-, second- and fourth-year students have held a joint meeting. . . ." He had started rather haltingly as usual, but warmed up as he went on. "What does this mean? It means that all the students of the History Department, faced with this national crisis, have roused themselves. We refuse to see our country ruined. We want to unite, to take collective action. We used not to have any organization of our own. Some classes had a phantom student committee, some didn't even have that. We were like a heap of loose sand. We can't let this state of affairs continue, friends! We're going to elect our own self-governing association, one which can represent the wishes of the majority, one which will lead us all in a noble cause — to resist Japan and save our country! . . ."

A burst of applause drowned his last words and, while the clapping was still going on, Wang Chung, the third-year representative, bounded up on to the platform. He was neatly but simply dressed today and his thin, monkey-like face was freshly

shaved. Signalling for silence, he launched into his carefully prepared speech:

"Fellow students, I am pleased and happy to be standing on this platform today and am stirred to my depths by this fine display of patriotic feeling. 'Every man alive has a duty to his country.' How can we, as university students, do nothing when our land is in danger? But. . . ." While his short, lean figure was still the centre of attention he suddenly went off at a tangent, saying, "But although we love our country and want to save it, we must find the right way to do this. Our ardour burns like a pure flame, our time is precious. We mustn't let our actions or organization be controlled by a bunch of die-hards and opportunists, who hang up a sign saying 'Mutton' but sell dog's meat! We know that agents in the pay of the Kuomintang are operating boldly in this university. They call for a National Anti-Japanese United Front and talk about 'uniting all those willing to resist.' For shame — this means surrender! These people are prostituting themselves for the reactionary rulers. If we are going to set up a self-governing association, we mustn't be fooled by these hirelings or taken in by their fine-sounding slogans. On behalf of all the third-year students, I want to make our position clear: we are not going to join a reactionary student association! We shall never recognize such an association!"

As soon as Wang Chung finished, his supporters applauded vigorously, but most of the students were taken aback and exchanged doubtful glances. It was as if a cold wind had sprung up on a warm summer day, suddenly filling the sky with lowering clouds. The enthusiasm generated by Hou Jui's speech vanished in a flash, and there followed a short but most oppressive silence. Then up to the platform ran Li Shao-tung, the young man with the face of a boy. He looked at the students' faces with a strangely compelling glance from bright, fearless eyes. As if hypnotized, they stared back unblinkingly. Even smug Wang Chung and anxious Wang Hsiao-yen seated behind him found their eyes irresistibly drawn to this striking youth. When he had gained complete attention, Li Shao-tung started speaking in a grave, forceful manner, strangely at variance with his boyish appearance.

"Fellow students! Things aren't always what they seem to be! Even the archaeologists have a hard time deciding which relics dug out of the earth are genuine and which are faked. Today, quite obviously, there are two kinds of people advocating resistance to Japan — one lot are genuine, the other are frauds. How can we tell the difference? The genuine patriots devote themselves heart and soul to serving the people and the state. The frauds hold high office, grind down the people and are selling piecemeal the land where our forebears have lived for generations. I don't have to go into details. The history of the last few years provides proof enough. Who threw away a fine part of this dear old country on September 18, 1931, forbidding any resistance to the enemy? Who betrayed the gallant 19th Route Army during the Battle of Shanghai and signed the dastardly cease-fire agreement? Who is letting the Japs and the traitors do as they please in North China, letting the movement for 'autonomy' coil like a poisonous snake all over this region, while they talk of friendly relations with our neighbours? . . . Those bigwigs who are selling the country are trying to pass off fish-eyes as pearls, posing as brave patriots concerned for the people. Let's turn to something nearer home — our History Department. We have frauds of this kind among us too. . . ." Li Shao-tung's talk had gone swimmingly so far, but now hisses and boos sounded from the back of the hall:

"Shame! . . ."

"Shut up! . . ."

Quite unruffled, he turned his brilliant eyes on the hecklers at whom all the rest were staring. Then with a powerful sweep of his hand he went on:

"It looks as if the frauds I mentioned are the people who booed just now. They pull long faces and shout indignantly about patriotism and national salvation in front of students with a sense of justice and a real concern for the country. Behind our backs, however, they make up to the secret service

and Kuomintang traitors, betraying their fellow students and betraying China. . . ."

"That's a dirty lie!"

"Let's have some proof! This is slander!"

The whole room seethed with excitement as the Kuomintang agents yelled indignantly and most of the other students joined in the shouting. It looked as if the meeting must break up in disorder. But Li Shao-tung chose this moment to take a slip of paper from his pocket. Standing in the middle of the platform, he waved it in front of them all and cried:

"I've been asked for proof. Here it is, friends! A receipt for a subsidy from the secret service! Signed by Wang Chung, a third-year history student, on behalf of his gang. . . ."

There was sudden, absolute quiet. Then, in the next moment of shocked bewilderment, a stone whizzed through the air towards Li Shao-tung's head. He had been on the lookout for something of the sort, and ducked in time, the stone smashing through the opposite window. Fragments of glass went flying in all directions, and shouting broke out again:

"Shameless coward! Come and argue it out! Don't stoop to such dirty tricks!"

"Never mind them — read out the receipt!"

After some brief, angry protests, the students quietened down. The Kuomintang agents among them also kept quiet, some of them slipped away, ostensibly to the cloakroom, while others edged nearer to the door to escape if need be.

Li Shao-tung held up the receipt and read:

"The October subsidy of 300 yuan, received by Wang Chung to divide between the following. . . ."

Before the names could be read, pandemonium broke out.

"Down with Wang Chung, the dirty spy!"

"Throw the sneaks out!"

"A Kuomintang agent who smears other people — shame!"

Angry arms shot up and fists were shaken. All eyes turned to Wang Chung's seat, which was already empty. He had taken advantage of the general confusion to escape. But Wang Hsiao-yen in the seat behind had not gone. All the colour had left her cheeks and her eyes were fixed unwinkingly on the blackboard. As if impervious to the frenzied struggle around her, she seemed to be brooding in some lonely isolated spot, deaf and blind to her surroundings.

The election which followed went smoothly. Li Shao-tung, with the boyish face but sound common sense, was elected representative of the History Department and chairman of the students' self-governing association. Hou Jui and other progressives were also elected.

That evening an exultant Hou Jui sought out Tao-ching to report what had happened, and they could not help laughing over the sorry figures the secret agents had cut. When Tao-ching asked how they had got hold of the receipt, Hou Jui told her the following story.

Wu Yu-ping and Wang Chung both came from Shansi and occupied adjoining rooms in the hostel. A girl in China University, also from Shansi, often called on Wu Yu-ping. Wang Chung took a fancy to this girl and begged Wu to introduce them — to this end he invited him to a number of meals. Wu asked the advice of Hou Jui, who urged him to get closer to Wang Chung, allay his suspicions and perhaps pick up some useful information. So one day Wu took the girl from Shansi to have a meal with Wang Chung. The latter was so pleased that he drank far too much. When he pulled out his wallet to pay the bill, he failed to notice that this receipt fell out and without his knowledge Wu Yu-ping picked it up. It was passed on to Hou Jui, who gave it to Li Shao-tung, and it had come in useful in the fight to expose and overcome Wang Chung. In fact, this had inflicted a crushing blow on all the Kuomintang agents in the university.

Tao-ching laughed again at the end of this account. After a minute or so she said:

"I have a strange feeling, Hou Jui."

"What's that?" He looked astonished.

"I feel as if I'd entered a treasure cave, where there are marvellous jewels to be found on every side. It's thanks to the Party's teaching, the Party's strength and the Party's influence. When I first came to the university, I saw nothing of all this wealth. Yet it was here all the time!"

Hou Jui nodded and chuckled.

"That's right. And as the struggle unfolds, we shall find more and more jewels. I never imagined, either, that there was such wealth hidden underground in the Peking University."

"Once we discover loyal supporters, we must protect them, help them and train them, mustn't we?" responded Tao-ching, smiling. "Li Shao-tung is a fine, able youngster. We must give him all the help we can. I hope he'll join our Party some day."

Hou Jui and Tao-ching now saw eye to eye when they talked. After discussing the next stage of their work, they separated in high spirits.

Chapter 39

One dark night late in November, when a cold wind was whirling snowflakes along the deserted streets and lanes, Chiang Hua knocked at Tao-ching's door.

She was writing beneath the light, near a stove that was giving out a comforting warmth. When Chiang Hua came in, she helped him to dust the snow from his clothes and then stirred up the fire.

"Is it very cold outside?" Offering him a cup of hot water, she smiled in pleasure. "Do you know, Old Chiang, a students' association was set up in Peking University today! And they have decided to join the Student Federation of Peiping and Tientsin."

Warming himself by the stove, Chiang Hua smiled without making any comment, as if this were no news to him. Tao-ching went on eagerly, "Thanks to your help, the work in Peking University is going ahead splendidly. Students who had been passive for years have now become active. I don't know how it is in other colleges, but I must say it wasn't easy in Peking University to put through our present policy for a national united front against Japanese aggression. Even some of our Party comrades couldn't see the point — they said it meant capitulation. In the past the progressives just discussed how to save the country with friends who shared their views. They denounced the backward students as traitors or simply ignored them. Now all this has changed. The middle-of-the-roaders have been won over and are rallying round us, while the reactionaries are being isolated. At the meeting to re-elect the student association in the History Department, Wang Hsiao-yen sat there looking foolish, hanging her head and not daring to meet anyone's eyes. In front of well over a hundred students, Li Shao-tung exposed Monkey-face Wang Chung as a liar and a dirty agent of the Kuomintang. We got hold of a receipt he'd signed for a subsidy from the Kuomintang and, when Li Shao-tung read this out the students were absolutely enraged. After that the re-election went smoothly for us. Isn't this wonderful, Old Chiang?"

Tao-ching paused for breath, realizing that she had let herself be carried away. It was strange how childishly excited she always felt in the company of this tall, kindly, taciturn fellow. Why was talking with him different from talking with others? She became self-conscious and tried to collect herself, asking:

"Old Chiang, didn't you say you had something to tell me? I'm sorry I've been out so much these days, but now that you're here, go ahead."

Chiang Hua was in a quandary, not knowing how best to broach the subject. His swarthy face reddened. Warming his capable hands over the stove, he tried to hide his emotion. He was twenty-nine; but apart from a boy-and-girl affair in high school had never been in love. He had waited patiently, letting slip many a chance of happiness. But he could not go on like this — indeed, there was no reason why he should torture himself any more or hurt the girl he loved. He raised his head and gently took Tao-ching's hand.

"Today I'm not here to discuss work," he said frankly, taking a firm grip on himself. "Tell me, Tao-ching, can we be more to each other than friends?"

There was a hungry look on Chiang Hua's face that Tao-ching had never seen before. The love and suffering in his eyes spoke more plainly than words, confirming what she had guessed for some time already. Her heart beat fast, her head swam and she felt faint. Her eyes filled with tears, but whether for happiness or sadness she could not say. Could she love this resolute revolutionary whom she had respected for so long? Her heart had been given all these years to another. . . .

She brushed her hesitations aside. A Bolshevik like Chiang Hua deserved all her love. What reason had she to refuse one who loved her so deeply?

She looked up at him silently for a moment before answering quietly and tenderly:

"Yes, Old Chiang, I do care for you."

After a searching glance he put his strong arms around her.

It was late, but Chiang Hua showed no intention of leaving. Nestling beside him, Tao-ching asked:

"Hadn't you better go? It's one o'clock. You can come back tomorrow."

Chiang Hua gazed at her, his face alight with happiness. Holding her close he pleaded in a voice that trembled:

"Don't drive me away! I'm not going."

Tao-ching rose and went outside. His request had confused and upset her. In the courtyard all was white. It was snowing hard and a cold wind was blowing. Roofs, ground, treetops . . . the whole world was enveloped in white. Ankle-deep in snow, she stood alone in the silence, her mind in a turmoil. A strange distress shot through her happiness as Lu Chia-chuan's face, which had just begun to fade, flashed vividly before her. She could never forget him, never! But why should he appear at this moment to overwhelm her? Murmuring his name, in fancy, she saw his clear eyes and the stubborn courage with which he had dragged his broken limbs across the gloomy prison cell. Tears streamed down her cheeks, wind and snow beat against her face, and her heart was at war with itself. She had hoped in vain that the cold air would clear her troubled head. She must not keep Chiang Hua waiting too long, she thought as she hurried inside.

Back in the room, she went up to him and looked at him with emotion.

"Did you mean it — you're not going?" she whispered. "All right, then, don't go!" She leaned her head bashfully against his broad shoulders and put her arms around his neck.

At daybreak they were still dreaming blissfully when a rapping at the door awoke them. The light but urgent knocking augured trouble. They jumped out of bed and exchanged inquiring glances.

"Have you any important documents? Let me get rid of them!" whispered Tao-ching, groping under the pillow.

"Keep calm!" advised Chiang Hua. Throwing on his coat, he went to the window and peered through a crack.

A girl's voice sounded faintly above the knocking:

"Tao-ching! Open the door! It's me, Hsiao-yen!"

"Hsiao-yen? . . ."

Chiang Hua had left the window and was hurriedly dressing. Tao-ching threw a wrap round her shoulders and opened the door to admit a dishevelled Hsiao-yen, so agitated that she had forgotten her glasses. She was taken aback to find a man in the room, but without stopping to greet them she threw her arms around Tao-ching and burst into tears. Indeed, so changed was she from her normal placid self that she wept and sobbed, unable to speak a word, as if her heart would break.

"Steady on, Hsiao-yen! What's happened?" Tao-ching's voice was as affectionate as if there had never been any estrangement between them.

Hsiao-yen's tears were wetting her friend's shoulder, but still she did not speak.

Tao-ching kept silent too, holding her close and caressing her.

"I'm so ashamed, Tao-ching! I had to tell you. . . ." Hsiao-yen made a great effort to control herself, but she broke down again and it was some minutes before she could say chokingly, "Cheng . . . Cheng Chun-tsai is a renegade. I've just found out — he's sold out to the enemy!"

Stunned as she was by this shock, it took her some time and cost her many tears to tell them all she had discovered.

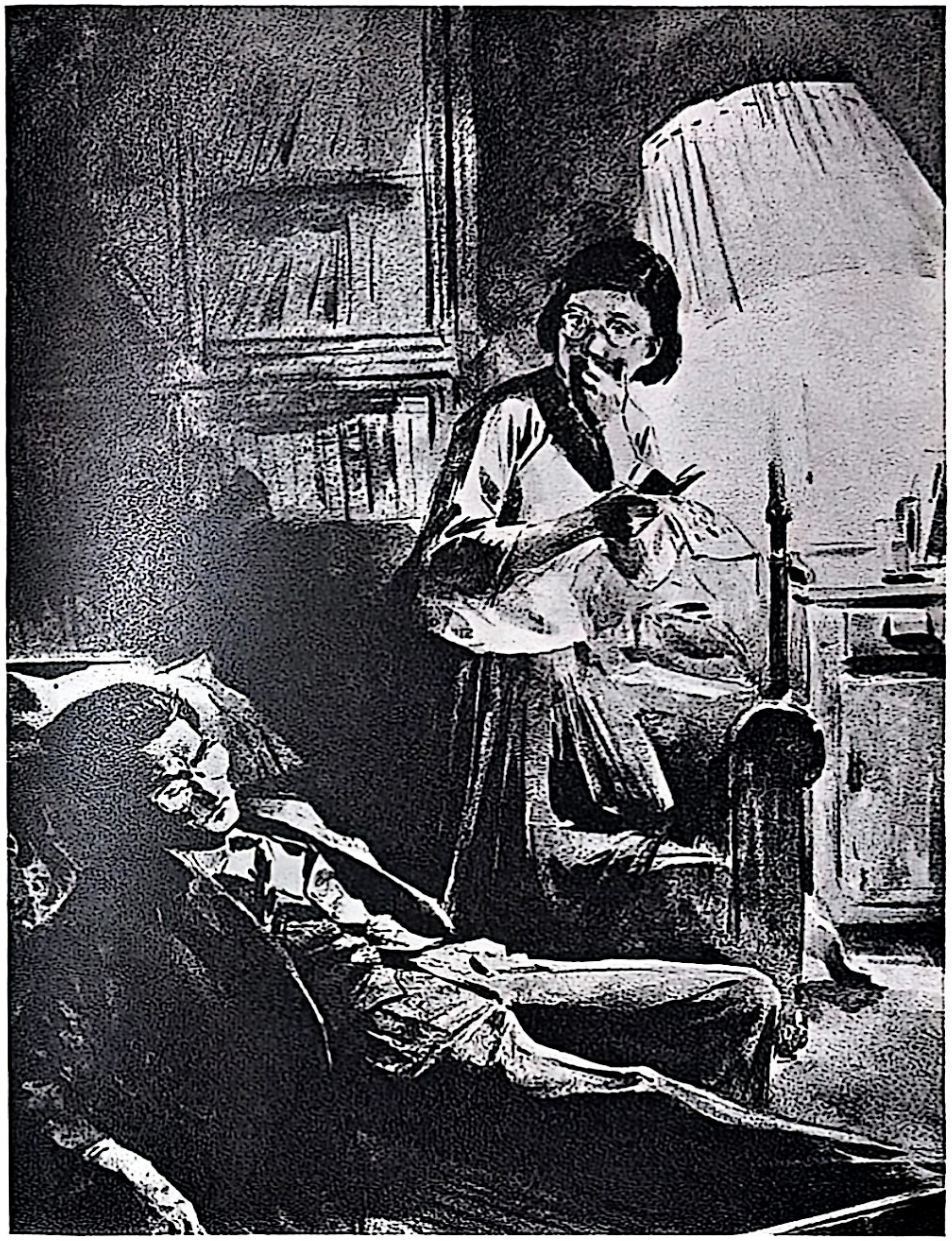
Tai Yu had passed himself off to her as secretary of the Peiping City Committee of the Communist Party. She had loved and admired him so much that, during her estrangement from Tao-ching, she had believed his lies about her friend's defection. Gradually her impression of him changed, however, for as time went by he acted more and more strangely. Generally he wore a hangdog look, yet now and then he would flare up and hold forth in a lordly manner, then stammer and contradict himself. She smelt liquor on his breath, powder on his clothing, and suspected that he was unfaithful to her. Suspicion of his personal behaviour also made her doubt his political integrity. Was he really the secretary of the Peiping City Committee of the Party? Had she really been admitted to the Party, as he claimed? Could there be anything good about men like Wang Chung, who attacked and injured honest Peking University students? And in what way, if at all, was Tao-ching wrong? Hsiao-yen began to keep a secret watch on Tai Yu.

She tried various methods to find out the truth about him, but she neither knew where he lived nor what friends or relatives he had, and to ask Wang Chung was out of the question. Her uneasiness increased. Yet love, first love, and the ardent dreams of youth made her powerless to break with him. She longed to discover that her suspicions were false, thought that they arose from her own narrow-mindedness, that he was the honest man he claimed to be, and that he was devoting himself heart and soul to the Party. But she was doomed to bitter disillusionment and the destruction of all her high hopes of happiness. One day she shadowed him from her house to a lane outside Hsuan Wu Men. There he knocked at a red-lacquered gate which was opened by a gaunt, middle-aged painted woman in a fur coat. When Tai Yu tried to take this woman's hand she brushed him aside and pinched his cheek playfully, saying, "Go in and wait for me!" Then she walked away while he slunk inside like a beggar.

Hsiao-yen was furious. This woman must be his wife or mistress, yet why had he vowed repeatedly that he loved and respected her alone, and how to interpret the sincere devotion which she had detected in his eyes?

After this discovery, Hsiao-yen treated Tai Yu so coldly for several days that he shed tears of distress. When she asked who the other woman was, he explained that she was another Party member who had to dress smartly to allay suspicion. They were colleagues, nothing more. Believing him against her better judgement, Hsiao-yen miserably accepted his "instructions" and went on deceiving the more gullible students. After Li Shao-tung's exposure of Wang Chung at the meeting of the History Department, she realized that something was seriously wrong and felt she could never hold up her head again. That evening — this had happened the previous day — Tai Yu reeled into her room muttering thickly and sank on to her bed in a drunken stupor. Hsiao-yen promptly searched his pockets. She found a letter, a strange identification card bearing nothing but a number, and a list of names of students from various colleges. A hasty reading of the letter appalled her.

From Hu Meng-an to "Brother Yu", it told him to work patiently in Peiping and carry out all instructions. If he did this, he could be sure of a big reward. His request to go to Nanchang could not be granted because Hu had no authority to transfer him. Everything was now dreadfully clear to Hsiao-yen. The list was a blacklist of Communist students and other progressives who were to be arrested. The card must be Tai Yu's identification as a secret-service agent of the Kuomintang. This scoundrel who denounced others as renegades and spies was most shameless renegade and spy himself! Trembling with rage, she slapped him till her hand tingled, but she failed to rouse him. Then she stumbled out into the courtyard



with the papers and leaned against a tree to steady herself. She remained out there in the biting wind till well past midnight.

Between two and three in the morning Tai Yu sobered up and rushed out to find her. He carried her back, nearly frozen, then fell on his knees and wept. He admitted having been false to her and the Party, cursed his own shameless weakness and swore that he repented of his crimes. But Hsiao-yen, prostrate on the bed, did not even listen to his lies. Her heart seemed to have turned into stone. She could not speak. Her whole world had collapsed in ruins about her ears. Tai Yu would not leave her, however. He wept crocodile tears and swore that he loved her truly, that because of this love and the purity of her affection there was still something human, some glimmer of light in his soul — the reflection of her good and noble nature.

These protestations left Hsiao-yen unmoved. She got up and paced the room, avoiding Tai Yu who followed her around, ranting drunkenly as if he were out of his mind. Cowardice had been his undoing, he explained, it was that which had made him betray the Party's trust. The enemy, taking advantage of his weakness, had forced him to sink so low that he could not look back or extricate himself. True, he had betrayed some comrades, but only under pressure. The woman Hsiao-yen had seen was a spy who made him do her bidding and satisfy her lust. Disobedience to her would cost him his life. He pleaded that when he fell in love with Hsiao-yen he had wanted to escape from this iniquity, to live with his sweetheart in peace, free from all worries and dangers. That was why he had asked Hu Meng-an for a transfer. He promised to marry Hsiao-yen as soon as he could free himself from the other woman's clutches. He would love her, be a good husband, never leave her. . . . All this had no effect on Hsiao-yen, however. She was thinking hard and coming to a decision. She would have no more to do with this vile man. She paid no attention to him, pretending to have fallen asleep at the table, till at last he staggered drunkenly away. Then she had come straight to Tao-ching.

Her story ended, Hsiao-yen broke down again.

"Tao-ching! Tao-ching! I'm ruined! Can you save me?"

"You're not ruined, Hsiao-yen. You can make a fresh start." Tao-ching's voice was low and soothing. Wiping her friend's tears, she asked, "How did you know where I live?"

Hsiao-yen gripped her hand and said with a rueful smile, "I once followed you, too, but I never told Tai Yu. Tell me what to do, Tao-ching. How can I go on? And how shall I deal with him?" She looked from Tao-ching to Chiang Hua, wiping her swollen eyes.

"We've met before, Hsiao-yen, haven't we?" cut in Chiang Hua with a nod. "Tell me, where are the papers you took from Tai Yu?"

"He snatched them back again."

"I see." After some thought, Chiang Hua continued, "I must remind you, Hsiao-yen, that you're not the only one involved in this, and just being sorry won't save the situation. Understand?"

"What do you mean?" She stared at him through her tears. "I just came to tell Tao-ching and ask her forgiveness for misjudging her. Nothing else entered my head."

"Don't start reproaching yourself!" Tao-ching took Hsiao-yen's hand. "You must be tired out. Lie down for a while."

She and Chiang Hua helped the trembling girl to the bed.

"This is what may happen," observed Chiang Hua slowly. "When Tai Yu sobers up and realizes that he's given himself away to you, Hsiao-yen, he's going to be on tenterhooks. What's more, you've seen some of his secret papers. It's only reasonable to conclude that if you refuse to go on being his tool, he will be afraid of you. That will make you a hated enemy. Has this occurred to you?"

"No!" Hsiao-yen closed her eyes and turned ghastly pale. "Surely not! Impossible! He loves me."

Tao-ching could not help breaking in, leaning towards the pillow.

"Hsiao-yen, how can you still look on him like that? You expect him to love you and take pity on you? I tell you, you're in great danger!"

Hsiao-yen kept her eyes closed and was silent, weeping.

After a few moments Chiang Hua walked up to the bed and said solicitously:

"It's always best to be on the safe side, Hsiao-yen. Not only you but all the progressives in every college will have to be on their guard. It's likely that since this spy has made out a blacklist, he will stoop to even dirtier tricks. You and Tao-ching had better go away for a few days. Tell your people to go away too. By the way, Hsiao-yen, do you remember the names on the blacklist?"

"Not very well. . . . Only Li Shao-tung, Hou Jui and Li Huai-ying of Peking University, and her. . . ." She pointed to Tao-ching.

Tao-ching leaned closer and said, "You see, Hsiao-yen, even Li Huai-ying is on his blacklist. That shows what Tai Yu is capable of! Are you convinced? Let's take Chiang Hua's advice and lie low for a while." Seeing that the other remained silent, Tao-ching wiped her tears for her and went on, "Hsiao-yen, you don't know how miserable I was when we were estranged. I'm so happy now that we've made it up again. Well, let's not talk about that any more. Let's plan what to do next. I suggest that you let me take you away for a few days. What do you say?"

"I'd like to have one last talk with him," pleaded Hsiao-yen. "Believe me, I don't trust him any more. I shall come back."

"We can't let you do that," declared Tao-ching firmly, helping her up. "Let's leave at once. If he knows where I live and he can't find you, he'll probably come here. Chiang Hua, you go first. Hsiao-yen and I will leave presently. We shall stay with a friend for a few days."

With an affectionate glance at Tao-ching, Chiang Hua whispered a few words to her. Then shaking Hsiao-yen by the hand he left the room.

"I've come between the two of you," said Hsiao-yen, looking distractedly after Chiang Hua. "Let's go, Tao-ching. I don't want to see him again."

Chapter 40

Back in his room after leaving Hsiao-yen, Tai Yu slept off his drunkenness and was appalled, when he woke, to recall his quarrel with Hsiao-yen. Things were going from bad to worse for him. During the last few days the student movement in Peiping had gone swiftly ahead, a number of students' associations and leagues to save the country had been set up, and many of these had joined the Student Federation. His small following in the schools had been repudiated by the vast majority of students, now awake to their responsibilities. He had been reprimanded for this by his Kuomintang masters and had tried to drown his sorrows in drink. And to crown all, Hsiao-yen had penetrated his disguise. That was the worst blow of all, for she had been his most faithful, reliable lieutenant, who had brought a spark of joy into his empty life. What was to be done? Could he save the situation and regain his hold over her? Lying in his gloomy, heavily curtained room, he thought hard, lighting one cigarette after another till the air was thick with smoke.

At two in the afternoon he got up, drew back the curtains and opened the window. The room was at once flooded with light and a gust of cold wind struck his pale, haggard face. He ran his fingers through his frowzy hair and sneezed several times, then hastily closed the window.

Without stopping to eat he made ready to go out. After a bath, he combed his hair, slipped into an immaculate white shirt and sprayed himself with eau-de-Cologne. Then he put on a brown tweed suit, a dark blue woollen overcoat, and adjusted an English trilby hat over his sleek black hair. Strangely enough, the care-worn Tai Yu dressed himself more smartly today than for any previous visit to Hsiao-yen. Outwardly, he was quite at his ease as, like a dandy without a care in the world, he made his way to her house.

He thought that Hsiao-yen's first reaction to her discovery of his secret papers must have been one of shocked distress. He consoled himself with the thought that she was in love with him and had been travelling the same road as him, and that it was too late for her to back out now. He'd have to make up a plausible explanation. Then if he watered the flowers of love with more tears, his good-hearted, simple Hsiao-yen would surely make it up with him.

Hsiao-yen was not at home. She had gone out first thing in the morning and not come back. He hurried to the university, but she was neither in her hostel nor any of the classrooms. When he failed to find her with any of her friends, he began to be really puzzled. He went back to her house to wait for her so that they could have a good talk.

Hsiao-yen's parents kept him company while he waited. Mrs. Wang offered him tea, while the professor started talking as eagerly as a boy.

"Do you know how things have changed at the university, Chun-tsai? All the young fellows have become active and everybody is talking of saving the country. Even the old professors, old fogeys like myself, are getting worked up and holding meetings to discuss the problem. This is what is meant by 'Men's hearts are not yet dead'. Don't you agree?" Standing up with a laugh, he pounded the table with one fist, making Tai Yu start. The spy turned pale and could not suppress a shudder, but he pulled himself together at once, and cordially said:

"It's a fine thing for a man of your age to be so concerned over the state of the nation, sir. You'll inspire those of us who are young to greater efforts."

Professor Wang waved a protesting hand.

"Not a bit of it! What does one individual count? According to Marx, it's the masses who are the true heroes and creators of history. One individual is quite insignificant. I assure you, Chun-tsai, in the field of letters we old professors may have something to teach you; but when it comes to patriotism and revolution, you young folk must give us a lead. Many of my students, I know, are going without food and sleep to work for the cause. The enthusiasm with which they're arousing the people to resist the enemy and save our country moves me, old as I am, to tears!" He took off his glasses and sheepishly wiped his eyes.

"Now, don't get so excited, dear!" In some embarrassment Mrs. Wang changed the subject. "Will you stay for supper, Chun-tsai? Hsiao-yen hasn't been back since she went out this morning. Did you have a quarrel last night?"

Tai Yu shook his head and answered laughingly:

"No, just a difference of opinion about the work. Things are tightening up: the Japs are pressing us harder every day. Hsiao-yen is temperamentally steady and slow. When I urged her to be more active she was upset, so I've come today to apologize."

"That's a small matter," Professor Wang cried. "What's made Hsiao-yen so petty-minded? But never mind, Chun-tsai, I'll talk to her. . . ."

"You mind your own business," interposed Mrs. Wang with a smile. "Why should we interfere in their affairs? Just let them alone. Well, while you two have a talk I'll go and get supper. It's time Hsiao-yen was coming home."

After she left the room, her husband reverted to the national crisis and Tai Yu seized a chance to say:

"You mentioned a moment ago, sir, that the professors are holding meetings too. Which professors? I may know some of them."

"Oh, a good many," was the vague reply. It had been agreed at the meeting not to divulge the names of those present and, though Cheng Chun-tsai was Professor Wang's future son-in-law, the seemingly absent-minded but alert old scholar was as good as his word. Chuckling and pretending to have forgotten the question, he said, "Tell me, Chun-tsai, how you have been doing lately. Is your work going well?"

"Just so-so. It's not quite my line . . ." mumbled Tai Yu, his eyes bulging. "Wants to fox me, eh? Damned old Red!" he swore to himself. A thought flashed through his mind: "I'll put him on the list too."

When Hsiao-yen still did not return, her parents began to be worried and telephoned to the university and to her friends. But no one had seen her. Tai Yu was even more worried than the old couple, for this meant the failure of his scheme. Something must have happened to Hsiao-yen. Had she committed suicide or gone over to the Communists? Neither possibility pleased him, but the second was the more dreadful of the two. She had found out his secrets and seen the blacklist of progressive students.

He left at ten o'clock. These new developments called for emergency measures. Walking down a pitch-dark lane, he hugged his shoulders in the cold wind as he did some quick thinking.

"She'll have to die — it's her or me. . . ." Suddenly he fancied that Hsiao-yen's gentle, innocent eyes were flashing fire at him. He stumbled and almost fell. Pulling himself together, he decided, "I must have her father arrested and make him tell which professors attended those meetings. That will count to my credit and make up for some past mistakes." Slipping his hand into his pocket, he fingered the blacklist ready to be handed in, and a sardonic smile twisted his mouth.

A cold wind was whistling along the deserted lanes as, rounding two corners, he reached the end of a long narrow alley. The next instant powerful hands seized him by the throat, stifling his cry of terror.

Before he knew what was happening, he was dragged into a black car. Deadly fear assailed him. "This is the end," he told himself, closing his eyes. "I'm done for. Chiang Hua and his gang will kill me now. . . ." But in his heart he was hoping against hope, "Maybe they'll let me off. . . . I'll never do it again. . . ."

"You useless fool, Cheng Chun-tsai!"

At the sound of this voice, Tai Yu opened his eyes and smiled. It was not Chiang Hua the Communist but Wang

Feng-chuan, his mistress and superior. This must be a practical joke to punish him for neglecting her. He groped in the dark for her hands, but the stout rope looped round his neck was being pulled tighter and tighter. Unable to utter a sound, he heard Wang Feng-chuan say:

"You fool! You couldn't even handle Wang Hsiao-yen! You couldn't even lead Wang Chung! You've messed up the Peiping schools nicely. . . ." Abruptly she raised her voice, "Take him away! And mind he's found all in one piece."

The car sped to the outskirts of the city and Tai Yu was slung out in a dark stretch of waste land. The lonely stars overhead blinked mockingly at the stiff corpse of the informer and renegade.

His hands folded behind him, Professor Wang was pacing up and down a friend's room, thoroughly on edge.

Hsiao-yen was sitting in silence by the table. Her head was bent and she looked thin and drawn, as if ten years had been added to her age.

When this silence grated on the professor's nerves, he halted to question his daughter. Despite his agitation his voice was gentle.

"Hsiao-yen, don't keep your father in suspense like this. Just tell me frankly why you're so upset, child! Why did the police raid our house? It's lucky that neither of us was at home. But now we're fugitives. There must be a reason. . . ."

"Daddy, promise you won't tell mother!" Hsiao-yen looked up beseechingly at her father's anxious face. Tears choked her and, covering her face with her hands, she sobbed incoherently. "Daddy, I've let you down! I've not lived up to the hopes you — and mother — had of me."

Professor Wang's ruddy face turned white. He had still no idea what had made his daughter despair. Leaning anxiously over her, he stroked her tousled hair and said urgently:

"Don't cry, child! Is it Chun-tsai? . . . Has something come between you? I know you've been quarrelling a good deal lately."

"Daddy!" Hsiao-yen stood up, her unhappy eyes blazing. "He was a devil! A spy! A traitor! He's ruined me — spoiled my whole life!" She threw herself on the bed in a storm of weeping.

Her horrified father fumbled with his glasses, taking them off and putting them on again. Standing distractedly by his daughter's side, he raised her head and said compassionately:

"Poor child! Dear Hsiao-yen! What does this mean? Is he such a blackguard as to want to have us arrested? Tell your old father everything. No, you don't have to tell me — I understand. . . ." He threw back his head, stared before him, and spat scornfully as if Tai Yu were standing there. "I see it now. He's a spy, a renegade, a hypocrite and a shameless stooge. Am I right, Hsiao-yen? But why let that worry us? He can go on being a stooge while we go on with our work. What can he do to us? Wait and see who wins in the end."

"No, no!" cried Hsiao-yen through clenched teeth. "He's dead — he's been killed."

The professor's eyes nearly started from his head. "I can hardly believe it! It sounds like something out of a novel! Are you telling me the truth, Hsiao-yen?"

Prostrate on the bed, she neither cried nor spoke. The pallor of her face and the way she was biting her lips testified to a fierce inner conflict. She wanted to banish Tai Yu from her thoughts for ever. Why should she break her heart over a contemptible informer? If only she could wake up and find it was all a bad dream!

"You mustn't give way, Hsiao-yen," urged her father softly, sitting down more calmly to look at her with concern. "Things are moving fast. This is just the time for you young people to redouble your efforts. Forget the past and begin all over again. Incidentally, do the Communists suspect you? Or do they still trust you?" He put this question gravely, a frown on his face.

"Tao-ching and I have made it up, daddy." A wan smile shone through her distress. "It was all his fault that we fell out. Do the Communists still trust me? Yes, they do, completely! If the Party hadn't come to my rescue, I'd really have been lost."

While Hsiao-yen tried to check another fit of weeping, her mother hurried in to take her in her arms. After Tai Yu left them that evening, Hsiao-yen had sent a message urging her parents to go into hiding and they had taken refuge with a friend. Mrs. Wang had overheard the conversation between father and daughter from outside the window. Her heart ached for Hsiao-yen and she felt partly to blame for her distress, bitterly repenting the mockery of their engagement. Running in to hug her daughter, she said with tears:

"I'm the one to blame, child. You're so young. . . . It was all the fault of that scoundrel! . . ."

Hsiao-yen, calmer now, tried to console her.

"Never mind, mother. I've got over it. And fear of public opinion will stop those thugs from doing anything to us. I think you and father might go home now. Tao-ching is waiting for me. We've so much to do! The Peiping Students' Federation is going to organize a huge demonstration. Have you heard about it, daddy?"

The old people — Professor Wang in particular — were pleasantly surprised by the confident determination in their daughter's face. Hsiao-yen, after hastily washing the tear-stains away from her cheeks, left the room without so much as a backward glance, as if all disgrace, darkness and distress were things of the past. The professor heaved a sigh of relief and said half to himself, half to his wife:

"Another storm is brewing. But these eaglets are utterly fearless!"

Chapter 41

It was the eve of the stupendous December the Ninth Movement in 1935.

Tao-ching was ill in bed with a high fever in the cold, bare lodgings to which she had recently moved. Towards evening

Hsu Hui, Hsiao-yen and Hou Jui gathered there and sat around the stove, talking in low voices.

"How long has she been ill?" Hsu Hui asked Hsiao-yen. "Have you sent for a doctor?"

"Yes, the doctor's been," Hsiao-yen answered in a whisper. "He says it's influenza. I'm afraid she's been overworking these last few days. She's been on the go day and night, talking with people and planning how to fight the reactionaries. Her resistance has also been lowered by lack of food."

Hou Jui shook his head, saying, "She's worn herself out.

"You should have looked after her better," Hsu Hui said, worried because Tao-ching seemed to be in a coma.

Just then Tao-ching recovered consciousness and, seeing the three of them, said with a smile, "When did you arrive? I'd no idea you'd come. Tell me, Hsu Hui, is our plan for tomorrow settled? There won't be any changes, will there?"

"It's not likely." Hsu Hui bent over her with a smile. "Don't you worry. Just have a good rest." She turned to ask Hou Jui beside her, "How many Peking University students do you think will take part in the demonstration?"

"It's hard to say for certain," replied Hou Jui. "We'll be doing some more work among them tonight and will make a final appeal tomorrow morning. I'm sure there'll be three or four hundred at the very least."

Tao-ching sat up abruptly and, staring at Hsu Hui, put in, "As soon as we get started tomorrow, Hsu Hui, the long dormant volcano will erupt. I'm sure a great many students will join in."

"Didn't Hsu Hui tell you not to worry? Yet here you go again, exciting yourself," protested Hsiao-yen as she made Tao-ching lie down.

" 'Big as North China is, there is hardly one quiet place left for study.' " Hsu Hui smiled at each of them in turn. "That's an apt quotation from our manifesto to be issued tomorrow. It reflects the eagerness of most of our people to resist Japanese aggression. The Party's calls for action this time are based on the wishes and political consciousness of the masses. . . . I'm afraid I must hurry off. Do you mind coming with me for a little way, Hsiao-yen? You can come back presently to look after Tao-ching." Just before leaving, she turned back to urge Tao-ching, "Now, have a good rest and don't you dare get up! I'll drop in again tomorrow. . . . Oh, I almost forgot, Chiang Hua asked me to tell you he'd come to see you after the demonstration tomorrow. Just wait for him quietly."

After Hsiao-yen and Hou Jui had filled Tao-ching's cup, tucked in her bedding, and made up the fire, the visitors went away.

"Tomorrow! The volcano will erupt tomorrow!" Tao-ching lay there thinking elatedly of the struggle about to come, and delirious with fever kept on muttering, "The volcano, the volcano. . . ."

Hsiao-yen came back before long, and after making sure that Tao-ching lacked nothing, she lay down beside her for the night. Before daybreak the next morning, she rose quietly taking care not to disturb her friend, but as she was dressing in the dark, Tao-ching awoke. She sat up and with trembling fingers switched on the light. Hsiao-yen made haste to stop her, protesting:

"Tao-ching, don't be silly! I felt you just a moment ago and you're still quite feverish. You mustn't go out today!"

Tao-ching laughingly began to put on her clothes. "The fever is gone. I'm all right again. Marching with the others will do me a lot of good."

Hsiao-yen flushed with anxiety, took Tao-ching by the hand and said earnestly:

"Hsu Hui left me in charge of you — I have to answer to her. You mustn't go out!"

"You're to answer to Hsu Hui, but what about me? Be a good friend and don't try to hold me back!"

Hurriedly washing her face and combing her hair, Tao-ching begged like a child, "Be a dear, Hsiao-yen! Stop fussing and let me go! There's so much to do, I must go. Be a dear, and let's take part in this great action together!" With that, she pulled a most reluctant Hsiao-yen, unwashed and uncombed, out into the courtyard. Tao-ching had tried to hide her weakness after her fever; but as she opened the courtyard gate and a piercing wind lashed their faces, her head swam and she would have fallen but for her friend's support.

Buffeted by the wind, Hsiao-yen found it hard to keep her balance as she held up her fainting friend. Her heart beat frantically, her strength was ebbing away and she did not know what to do. Fortunately, Tao-ching soon recovered, but when Hsiao-yen tried to help her back inside the room, she firmly refused to move. Hsiao-yen pleaded with tears in her eyes:

"Do go back and lie down, Tao-ching! I know you don't want to miss the demonstration, but I'll do what I can to take your place. If I shed blood, a part of it will be yours." Tears were streaming down her cheeks.

Before Tao-ching, who was leaning on her arm, could reply, the still air vibrated with voices raised in song. It was a passionate, stirring song born of the struggle, and bringing strength to men. The two girls turned their heads to listen and a solemn expression overspread their faces.

Workers, peasants, soldiers, students, trades-folk,
Unite to save our nation!
Take up arms and leave
Your factories, fields and classrooms
To hasten to the front —
To the battlefield of national salvation.

It was not a new song. They had heard it many times before, yet, in the still darkness just before battle they seemed to be hearing it for the first time, and their hearts were deeply stirred. It was a bugle call to advance, a battle-cry. Tao-ching's heart was beating so rapidly that she could not speak. Then, collecting herself, she released Hsiao-yen's arm and gave her a gentle push, saying:

"Go and join them, quick! I'll wait here for the good news!"

After Hsiao-yen left, Tao-ching spent the day in bed, but she could not sleep. From time to time she listened to the tumult in the streets — the shouting of slogans mingled with the howling of the wind — which echoed through her room, warming her heart, and sounded as if it must carry right across the world. One moment she felt that she was in a dream world; the next, she imagined she was out in the midst of the revolutionary storm.

When dusk came, the freezing wind was still howling outside her window. Curled up in her quilt, and tired with waiting, Tao-ching fell asleep. An icy cold touch awakened her and, opening her eyes, she switched on the light to see Li Huai-ying and Hsiao-yen shivering by her bedside.

"At last you're back! How did it go?" She caught hold of their hands and struggled to sit up.

"Don't get up. . . . We're frozen!" The two girls were shivering and could hardly speak for cold. Their faces were purple and there were icicles hanging from their hair. Hsiao-yen's cotton-padded gown and Huai-ying's fur coat were both like sheets of ice, but they were cheerful and excited, especially Huai-ying, who was smiling with half closed eyes, her lips too numb for talk.

"Why are you covered with ice? How did everything go? I've been waiting so impatiently to hear what happened!" Tao-ching handed the padded gown which was lying over her quilt to Huai-ying, saying, "Look! Your coat is caked with ice! Change into this, quick!"

Huai-ying, who had been smiling, threw her arms without warning around Tao-ching and wept.

"Tao-ching, I've been living in a dream all these years. Today, at last, I've learned how we should live!" She was laughing and crying at the same time; tears were streaming down her pretty cheeks.

Hsiao-yen took her arm, saying:

"Don't get so worked up! This calls for a celebration. . . ." As she spoke, her own eyes grew moist.

Forgetting her illness, Tao-ching got out of bed with only a thin cardigan on. Standing in the icy room and taking her friends' hands, she exclaimed:

"Really! What are you two so upset about? You're getting sentimental! Look, it's cold today. You go to your rooms to change and then come back!"

The ice in the two girls' hair was beginning to melt and the water was trickling down their faces. The ice on their clothes was also melting, making them feel colder than ever. Hsiao-yen, her teeth chattering, rebuked Tao-ching:

"Get back into bed! How's your fever? Any better? There's nothing the matter with us. This is the doing of the police — dirty dogs! — who turned hoses on us in Wangfuching Street. Wait a few minutes, we'll come back to tell you all about it."

"Did you see Hsu Hui? Why hasn't she come?" asked Tao-ching.

"She's back. She'll be here soon. Well, why don't you ask about Chiang Hua? Not interested in him?" Hsiao-yen had livened up again.

"Be quiet and go and change! I'll expect a full report when you get back."

Left alone, Tao-ching's thoughts did in fact turn to Chiang Hua. Not since that first night had they had a chance to be together or see each other. Living apart, each worried about the other. During the last two weeks he had sent her several messages to say that he was well and would come as soon as he had time. The days slipped by and a whole fortnight passed. It did not matter if he did not come, so long as he was well. Tao-ching was longing for him with all her heart. Ah, if she could see him standing before her now safe and sound, how happy she would be! But he did not come.

After a while Hsiao-yen returned in dry clothes. Huai-ying stayed behind because she was impatient to describe her doings to friends who had not joined in the parade.

Hsiao-yen gave Tao-ching a detailed account of what had happened.

That morning a contingent of Peking University students had gathered in front of the East Hostel. There were already particles of ice on their scarves for it was bitterly cold, but their enthusiasm triumphed over the freezing winter weather. Li Huai-ying's appearance in a fur coat and high-heeled shoes came as a surprise to many of the students. Then her clear, high voice rang out in the middle of the crowd, "Fellow students! Come out of your ivory towers! Come out of your classrooms! Fight to save the nation!" Many waverers were moved by this call to join the ranks. They marched without stopping to Hsin Hua Men, where a sea of people had gathered — tens of thousands of students from different colleges and high schools. "Down with Japanese imperialism!" "Stop carving up China — down with the autonomous movement!" "We will give our blood to fight a way out!" The sky above the ancient capital reverberated to wave after wave of these enthusiastic slogans.

Student delegates handed their six-point petition to the authorities, demanding: (1) No secret diplomacy; (2) No partitioning of China; (3) Freedom of speech, assembly and patriotic movements; (4) An immediate cessation of all civil war; (5) No illegal arrests; (6) The immediate release of all students arrested on account of patriotic activities.

The garrison commander's spokesman tried to throw dust in their eyes, but rejected these just and reasonable demands. The demonstrators then commenced a huge protest march.

Hundreds upon hundreds of students four abreast and arm in arm marched down West Changan Street. They shouted slogans and distributed handbills. Increasing numbers of workers, government employees, pedlars, ricksha-men and even housewives spontaneously joined the parade. The indignant marchers shouted slogans and very soon all traffic was brought to a standstill. The number of police and soldiers following the demonstrators and attempting to block their advance also increased. Out for blood with their bayonets at the ready, they were posted every few feet along the marchers' route. When the parade reached Hsitan, the ranks were broken by a sudden attack with swords, whips and bayonets. However, thanks to well-planned liaison work, the students slipped through the side lanes to rally again on the main street north of the Hsitan Bazaar. They continued northward until they reached Catholic University, halting there to shout slogans at the top of their voice. This was a missionary institution run by the imperialists, but when the students inside heard this storm of shouting they could not stay in their classrooms and rushed out to join the demonstration. The procession restarted, the roar of slogans filled the air, and handbills were distributed along the route. More private citizens, workers, housewives and small tradesmen joined in. When the swelling columns reached the southern end of Wangfuching Street near the Legation Quarter, the lackeys of imperialism formed a solid block of police and soldiers, armed and ready to shoot. In an instant, fire hoses sprayed icy water on the demonstrators' heads, and glittering, naked swords hacked at their bodies. The reactionaries thought to disperse the patriotic parade by this savagery. The people were undaunted. The overcast sky rang with their shouts as the students marched on, their heads high. In spite of swords, whips, clubs and bayonets, the bitter wind, the jets of icy water from the fire hoses, the spilling of blood of young and old, women as well as men — in spite of all this the demonstrators fought on. When those in front fell in pools of blood, those behind pressed forward to take their place. "Forward!" they cried. "Charge the traitors!" Their cries of indignation rose higher and higher.

Through the ice and blood, they fought their way. When one girl fell exhausted, the police lashed at her savagely with their whips till her face and head were bleeding, but still she called out shrilly, "Citizens, unite! Arm yourselves! We must rise to save China!"

The struggle went on till sunset when the leaders of the demonstration gave orders for the ranks to disperse in order to avoid unnecessary casualties. Then, slowly, the angry crowds scattered. Hsiao-yen had been clubbed on the shoulder, but the injury was not serious. Lively Huai-ying had darted here and there through the excited, vociferous crowd, as a self-appointed liaison officer. When a sword on the left was raised, she would shout out a warning. When someone on the right stumbled, she would run over to help him to his feet. Threatened by the police with their weapons she would calmly demand, "Don't hit me. I'm only a passer-by." Her expensive fur coat and nonchalant air made them hesitate to molest her. As she and Hsiao-yen helped Hsu Hui, who had been hurt, limping along in her high-heeled shoes, she observed with a chuckle, "Both courage and tactics are needed in a fight."

"At last my faith in our university has been restored," declared Hsiao-yen as she reached the end of her narrative. After a moment she added, "I thought at first that the militant spirit of the May the Fourth Movement and the September the Eighteenth Incident would never be revived, but today I've had to change my view. Tao-ching, I forgot to tell you that when our parade passed by Shatan, another big contingent of Peking University students joined us. It was marvellous!" She went on to give more details of what had happened.

On the morning of December 9, many Peking University students joined the demonstration but an even larger number remained in their classrooms, in the library, or on the sports ground. Before the main body of the parade reached the university, liaison officers acting on instructions from the organizers came back to the university and shouted, "Wake up, fellow students! Remember the May the Fourth Movement!" The response to this call was swift and heartening. Students came pouring out from all over the university, from the hostels, the classrooms, the laboratories, the geology block, the library and the sports ground. They assembled in the Red Building and, when the demonstration arrived, threw open the doors and rushed out to join it. New slogans were heard: "Students of Peking University, welcome to our parade!" "Wake up, Peking University! Live up to your fine tradition! Remember May the Fourth!" Hou Jui seized this occasion to ring the big bell, which marked the end of classes, as if it were sounding the knell of the maxim "Save the country by study!" in which so many students had believed.

At this point in Hsiao-yen's account, Hsu Hui hurried in. She had changed into a dry padded gown, but blood was still oozing from a gash in her forehead. Before Tao-ching could speak, she was at her bedside asking:

"Are you feeling better? Has your temperature gone down?"

Tao-ching took Hsu Hui's hand and, ignoring her question, said:

"Hsu Hui, why don't you go to the hospital to have those cuts bandaged? It's dangerous to leave them exposed."

"Stop fussing!" Hsu Hui laughed as she deftly set Tao-ching's quilt to rights. "They're really nothing but scratches. I've no time to bother with them. Tell me, are you better?"

"Yes, thanks. How did everything go? Were our casualties heavy? Were there any arrests?"

"Yes, two girls from the Normal University were badly bayoneted. Many Peking University students were hurt too. One had his nose and lips cut open by a sword, and as far as we know, there have been more than ten arrests."

"What's our next move?" asked Tao-ching anxiously.

"That's what I would like to know!" chimed in Hsiao-yen.

Hsu Hui stood up to get a drink but, finding the tea-pot empty, shook her head and remarked:

"Did your landlady go to the demonstration too? Didn't she even leave you some water to drink? . . . Oh, you asked about our next move." She reflected for a moment, then told them with a smile, "We must do a more thorough job and stir up more people so as to integrate the student movement with the larger struggle of the workers and peasants. The volcano has started to erupt — let it burn up all that's dark and evil!"

Hsu Hui uttered these last words as if reciting a poem or taking a solemn oath. Then the three girls raised their heads to look at the dark night sky outside the window.

Chapter 42

After the December the Ninth Movement, the students of Peking University went on strike, as did those of many other colleges and high schools in Peiping.

On December 11, Tao-ching was better but still so weak that Hsu Hui forbade her to leave her room, insisting that she should rest and lie low for a while. Cut off, for the time being, from the stirring events outside, she stayed in bed and read.

Chiang Hua did not come to see her on the ninth nor on the tenth. He arrived during the evening of the eleventh.

He came in looking very cheerful. Rubbing his cold hands, he told her affectionately:

"I don't have to go away today, Tao-ching. We can spend a few days together at last. For the last two weeks I've had no time to come and see you. We've been what people call 'husband and wife for a night.' "

"Can you really stay?" asked Tao-ching, radiant with joy. She took his big hands as if she could not believe it. "Is it true? But why are you so pale? Have you been ill?" She looked at him with startled eyes, her heart beating fast.

"There's nothing wrong with me. Are you better now?" he asked, sinking down on the bed.

She examined him with concern.

"I don't believe you. If you haven't been ill, why are you so pale? Did they beat you up?"

Chiang Hua laid his head on the pillow and closed his weary eyes for a while. Opening them again, he said to Tao-ching, who was standing at the bedside:

"No. On the day of the demonstration those of us who were in charge stayed in Yapei Cafe, which was quite safe, but last night Northeast University was surrounded by about two hundred gendarmes. They had come to arrest the leaders of the demonstration. I happened to be there. . . ." He looked at Tao-ching, his bloodless lips curved in a smile. "We escaped in the nick of time by jumping over the wall. It was snowing hard and I was barefooted. I slipped and fell from the high wall on to a pile of wood in the next courtyard. I think I hurt my back a little." The more casually he spoke, the more Tao-ching, knowing him, worried.

"Let me see where you're hurt." She tried to unbutton his padded gown, but he would not allow this.

"It's already bandaged; leave it." He took her hands. "Tao-ching, have you heard about the effects of the demonstration? All the schools in Peiping have gone on strike and the students of the whole country are following suit. The movement to resist Japan and save China is a beacon which our Party has kindled, after overcoming countless difficulties — but now it's well ablaze!"

"Yes, so I've heard." Tao-ching smiled and, putting her cheek against his, tried to change the subject. "You must be tired. Let me tell you what's in my heart. I haven't seen you for so long — do you know how I've been missing you? . . . Oh, when shall we be able to be together always?"

Chiang Hua nodded and a smile of happiness lit up his swarthy face, now so thin and pale. He opened his tired eyes slowly and, holding her hands more tightly, said:

"Tao-ching, this is the first time in my life, in all these twenty-nine years, that I've known love. Only my mother, when I was a child, loved me the way you do. That's why I want with all my heart to make you happy. . . . But I've so little to give you."

Tao-ching's small room was warm and peaceful today. Bright red flames were rising from the coal-balls in her stove. The feathery green leaves of the asparagus fern Huai-ying had given her were cascading over one corner of the table.

After he had spoken, she shook her head in happy discomfiture, protesting:

"That's no way to talk! Don't we share the same sufferings and joys? Do you think I want more than that? No, I'm very happy, happier than I've ever been before!" She took a deep breath, her pale face calm and gentle. "I often think I owe all this to you — it's thanks to you, to the Party, that my dream's come true today and that I'm a fighter for the glorious cause of communism! If we can advance our cause, can do something useful for the Party, what happens to the two of us counts for very little."

Chiang Hua made no reply and both were silent till Tao-ching slipped her arms around him and whispered, "How lovely that you can stay for a few days this time! Think how little we've been together." She nestled shyly up to him and smiled, but raised her head presently to ask, "Tell me, dear, are you badly hurt? Tell the truth, now! You're always trying to set an example no matter where you are."

"It's nothing much," he replied slowly, closing his eyes. "That's the truth. If it were serious, how could I be talking now?" He opened his eyes suddenly and laughed. "In certain respects you still don't understand me, dear. You think my mind is full of politics and nothing else, don't you? Well, I like a bit of fun too and I have my dreams as well. You didn't know that, did you?"

"No, I didn't. What do you dream about?"

"About you! Do you believe that?" He put his arms around her and kissed her on the cheek so boyishly that Tao-ching could not help laughing. She put his head on the pillow and stroked his hair as if he were a mischievous child, saying:

"I know, dear. I believe you."

Chiang Hua smiled without speaking, holding her hand tight as if afraid she might escape. After a little he asked abruptly:

"You like to write poetry, don't you? Have you written any recently?"

"How do you know I like writing poetry?" she asked in surprise.

"I know because I've read one of your poems!"

It flashed into Tao-ching's mind that he must have read her poem in memory of Lu Chia-chuan. She recalled that just as he came that day, she had slipped it into a book on her desk. Blushing at the thought, she pressed his hand to her cheek and whispered, "You don't mind, do you? I can't write poetry. It was only for him, for your friend, that I tried. I'm sure you can understand that, dear, and not mind."

Chiang Hua was silent, his expression serene. Only a well-tried revolutionary could have met such a situation so calmly

and candidly. After a moment's silence, he said in a low voice:

"Dear, didn't you just say that we shared the same sufferings and joys? That goes for everything. I'm glad you write poetry; that's why I brought it up — don't misunderstand me. . . . Well, let's talk about something else. We so seldom get the chance. You've often asked about my life, but I've never had time to tell you anything. Would you like to hear something about it now?"

He paused for breath, drank the water she offered him and lay back again with closed eyes. "My father was a printer, who had to support my mother and six children. Normally he managed, but if he lost his job or his press was late paying wages the whole family went hungry. When I was twelve I did something very wrong, something very unkind to my mother. You take me for a steady sort of fellow, don't you? But I used to be a little devil, always in some scrap. After school, I would wander through the alleys of Shanghai with my gang in search of excitement. In my twelfth year, I remember, mother had just given us a baby sister and father, who was out of work, was out hunting for a job. Mother was lying-in with nobody to look after her. As I was the eldest, she told me to borrow some rice from a neighbour and make her a little rice gruel, but I went off to play with my friends instead. We wandered down to the docks and picked up what we could to eat, but I forgot that mother and the kids were hungry at home. I went back after dark when I was tired of playing. Father hadn't yet come home and mother was lying there crying. In the dim light she looked as pale as a corpse. My brothers and sisters were sprawled on the floor, asleep. Mother didn't say a word to scold me, but the misery on her face made an impression on me that I'll never forget. I burst out crying because I knew I'd done wrong. That's when I began to grow up. . . ." He opened his eyes, too tired to go on.

Tao-ching wiped the sweat from his forehead, whispering:

"You're talking too much, dear, getting too worked up. You'd better be quiet and rest."

"I'm not tired. We should have more talks like this." With a smile at her he continued:

"If it hadn't been for the Party, I don't know what would have become of me. The Party rescued me, poor urchin that I was. As soon as I became an apprentice, the Party began to train and educate me. Later I entered a high school set up by the Party and received further education. Whenever I thought of my mother's pale, tear-stained face as she lay in bed after the birth of my little sister, I realized that this rotten society must be changed."

"Is your mother still living?" asked Tao-ching gently.

"I've had no word from her for four years," he answered after a pause, opening his eyes. "What have I been saying? My mind keeps wandering. There's something I meant to tell you: Hsu Ning has been arrested again."

"No! He told me he was going to northern Shensi. How did he get arrested again?"

"He didn't go. The Party sent him to help with the work in Northeast University. He and I both jumped over the wall at dawn this morning and he hid under a girl's quilt — but in the end they got him."

What had happened was this: After the Japanese occupation of the Northeast, the students of Northeast University were cut off from their homes. As refugees without enough to eat, they had a worse time of it than other students. For the sake of an education and the two poor meals a day which the university offered, they had to swallow their bitterness and put up with the life of slaves for four years. Their defiance of the threats of the authorities and their bold participation in the demonstration on December 9 resulted in vicious reprisals.

On their return from the demonstration they were called together to be harangued by the dean, who said, "I must tell you that two Japanese were here just now to ask whether we could keep our students in order. If not, they said, they would keep order for us. I hastened to assure them, 'Yes, we can, of course we can!' " After describing his servile behaviour, the dean went on to abuse the students. "You hot-headed fools!" he fumed. "If you really have any guts, if you think yourself men, take up arms and fight the Japanese directly! Why hide yourselves here and make trouble?"

Then followed a blockade by armed police and gendarmes who kept a close watch on the university gate. The students were virtually prisoners, not allowed to come or go as they pleased. Still they fearlessly carried on patriotic activities inside. Two days later, on the night of December 11, when it was snowing hard, a large detachment of gendarmes surrounded the place. During this critical struggle, Chiang Hua, Hsu Ning and other Party members in Northeast University had never left the school for a moment. The student patrols reported this new development; but the night was dark and heavy snow was falling — how could they break through the cordon? Chiang Hua and the others, unable to leave just then, had to find temporary hiding-places. Just before daybreak prison vans began to arrive, accompanied by more gendarmes with loaded rifles. Guided by the university authorities, who had provided them with a blacklist of more than thirty names, they searched the hostels and every corner of the building, after which martial law was declared on the premises. The dean and military instructor took charge inside, while gendarmes guarded the gates to stop anyone from leaving. Their position was now so desperate that the student leaders named on the blacklist had no alternative but to get out. Chiang Hua fell while climbing over the wall, and gashed himself on a nail but made good his escape. Hsu Ning nimbly scaled the low western wall and vaulted into a neighbouring courtyard, but before he could open the gate and get away, he was seen by the gendarmes who rushed up in pursuit, firing their rifles as they came. The old man and his daughter who lived in that house, hearing the thud as Hsu Ning alighted in their yard, opened the door and looked out fearfully. Seeing that his retreat was cut off, he threw himself on their mercy, crying, "Save me, uncle! I'm a student." The old man and his daughter, in spite of their alarm, promptly let him in; but the girl had barely covered Hsu Ning with a quilt, and taken her stand in front of the bed when the gendarmes burst into the room. They menacingly said to the old man, "Where is he? Hand him over!" The old man and his daughter denied that anyone was there. "You damned liars!" swore the gendarmes. "We saw him come in. His foot-prints are all over the room. Do you want to help the Red bandits? If you don't speak out, you dog, you'll get the same punishment." They went on denying that anyone was there, though the girl standing by the bed was trembling with fright. Hsu Ning could not remain hidden, so he sprang up fearlessly and was arrested.

Chiang Hua, who seemed to have fallen asleep, opened his eyes now to look at Tao-ching and said gravely:

"Now that most students in the city have stopped going to class, the reactionaries are bound to try sabotage. The struggle is going to get more involved. You've not a great deal of experience yet, Tao-ching, so you must work harder than ever. Don't feel complacent because of what you've achieved at Peking University. We must all fight on without slackening. . . ." At this point, he fell fast asleep.

Standing silently by the bed, Tao-ching gazed at Chiang Hua's wan face which, in spite of its pallor, was set in determined lines. Though badly hurt he would not speak of his pain. Even during this happy reunion, even though he was almost fainting with fatigue, Chiang Hua could not forget the work and struggle at hand, nor the need to encourage his wife to make still greater progress. As for that poem which she had written in memory of another man, although Chiang Hua was fully aware that her heart had been given more fully and deeply to Lu Chia-chuan than to him, he had not complained. Limited as were his time and strength, he was doing all he could to make her happy. As she stood there silently watching him, a sense of unworthiness came over her.

Seeing that his cotton-padded gown was torn in several places, she fetched needle and thread to mend it. In one of the pockets she found a crumpled piece of paper in Chiang Hua's steady hand. She smoothed it out and read, "I'm sorry, Tao-ching, but for the third time I can't keep my promise. . . ." Her eyes filled unaccountably with tears as she looked at that ordinary scrap of paper.

"Is Miss Lu in?"

"Who is it?" Tao-ching put down the note and softly opened the door. It was Jen Yu-kuei's father, who had previously shared the same courtyard with her and had now become a messenger for the Party's City Committee. Pleased as well as surprised, she took the old man's hand and drew him into the room. "What is it, uncle?" She motioned towards Chiang Hua and whispered, "He's been hurt." There must be important business, she knew, for the City Committee to send a messenger.

The old man nodded and went to the bed to look anxiously at Chiang Hua's sleeping form. Then turning to her he asked, "When was he hurt? The comrades don't know about it. There is an important meeting this evening. Shall I tell them he can't go? Is it serious?"

Looking at Chiang Hua's colourless face, Tao-ching said in distress:

"He says it's not serious but he won't let me look at it. According to him, a nail gashed his back. I think the loss of blood has weakened him. Do you think we should wake him?"

"I wouldn't," said the old man with a sympathetic shake of his head. "I'll go and tell them, so that he can stay here and rest for a few days." With this he started off.

"Wait, uncle, let's go together!" Chiang Hua had woken up, and was slowly getting up to put on his padded gown. He whispered apologetically to Tao-ching, "Sorry to break another engagement! You had better go to sleep. Don't sit up for me, I shan't come back if it's very late."

Silently she saw him off. His tall form, following the shambling steps of the thin old man, disappeared at the turn of the lane. Tao-ching thought quietly to herself: "Lu Chia-chuan, Lin Hung and Chiang Hua — how alike they are!"

Chapter 43

Tao-ching was sitting with Teng Yun-hsuan in his lodgings, discussing the rights and wrongs of the students' strike, when there came a tap at the door and a girlish voice called clearly:

"May I come in, Mr. Teng?"

Hastily opening the door a crack, Teng saw Li Huai-ying in a green cardigan and green coat, smiling, as she stood on his threshold. Throwing the door wide open, he bowed ceremoniously from the waist and cried:

"This is an unlooked-for honour, Your Majesty!"

Huai-ying skipped into the room and shook her small white fist in his face, declaring with a laugh:

"If it were not that you're usually well-behaved, I'd smash your glasses for you! . . . Oh! . . ." Catching sight of Tao-ching, she gripped her hand and said, pointing to Teng, "What magic drug have you used to change Mr. Dry-as-Dust, who spends all his time buried in old books, into a cheeky youngster? He used to be such a model of propriety!"

Covering his glasses and nose as if Huai-ying had really hit him, Teng made haste to apologize:

"I beg your pardon, Huai-ying! Don't take offence!"

His deflated, embarrassed look made both girls burst out laughing. That only embarrassed him the more. He hardly knew which way to look and could only repeat:

"Don't laugh, ladies! Don't laugh! . . ."

Huai-ying sobered down and took his arm.

"I've come to take you to a meeting, Mr. Pedant. You'll be very, very pleased to go. It's very, very important!"

"What's this important meeting? Why haven't I heard about it before?" He again fumbled nervously with his glasses.

Huai-ying shook her fist once more.

"Of course, Mr. Dry-as-Dust, if you never listen to what's going on outside, but give your whole mind to old books, you don't hear about important affairs of state. Since we stopped attending classes on the tenth, the government's grown frantic. Today President Chiang has called a big meeting to make an important announcement. Hurry up and go, Mr. Pedant!"

"No, I don't think I will." He shook his head and sank heavily on to a stool, looking as exhausted as if he had just run a hundred-metre race.

It was Tao-ching's turn now and she said with a smile:

"Aren't you against the strike because it interferes with your studies, Old Teng? I'm sure President Chiang's called this meeting because he shares your view. Since you see eye to eye, why not go along?"

"Come on, quick! If I'm going, you certainly ought to be there!" Huai-ying caught hold of him to drag him off.

Teng, at a loss, waved his dissent, his eyes wide with alarm. Tao-ching gave him a little push, saying:

"Go and have a look. I'm not a student here, but I want to know what Chiang Meng-lin has to say. You have even more reason to go."

With one girl pushing and the other pulling, Teng moved off, remonstrating:

"I don't approve of the strike, but not for the same reasons as the authorities. Don't misunderstand me. . . . Of course, we students should do what we can to save the country in its hour of need, but. . . . But. . . ."

"But what? Forget it! On the ninth when the rest of us took our lives in our hands, didn't you feel bad, Mr. Pedant, sitting in your study?" Huai-ying's taunt made Teng blush up to his ears. Panting as he hurried along, he protested loudly:

"That's not fair! How was I to know. . . ."

Tao-ching nudged him and whispered, "Hush! The place is full of gendarmes."

Huai-ying and the young man looked daggers at each other and were silent.

They were nearly at the gate of the Third Court when Tao-ching made peace between them.

"Stop sulking, you two! Look how full the assembly hall is. . . . The meeting's going to be well attended." The three of them filed in.

The Peking University students had been on strike for nearly a week and showed no intention of resuming classes. President Chiang Meng-lin had been active behind the scenes, planning this big meeting to urge them to go back to class, and his efforts had been rewarded. From three to four hundred of the students were assembled, more than a third of the total enrolment. They sat, absolutely quiet, on the benches of the dingy assembly hall to hear the president's speech. He started off, less like a live man expressing his own ideas than a gramophone playing a dull, barely intelligible record. He announced:

"I am very happy today to see so many of you here. These are troubled times when rumours are rife, but I want to talk to you seriously today for your own sakes, for the sake of the university's good name, and because I have my instructions from above. . . ."

"Come to the point!" someone shouted from the hall. "Don't beat about the bush!"

The president hastily produced a sheaf of documents from his brief-case and with a glance at Hu Shih, chairman of the Chinese Department, who was beside him on the platform, extracted one paper. Then, his eyes perusing the document, he proceeded loudly:

"I have just received an order from the Ministry of Education which I will read out to you. . . ." Clearing his throat, he intoned, "The national crisis has assumed grave proportions and the Peiping students have repeatedly demonstrated their patriotism for the government and nation to see. The patriotic youth must learn, however, not to confound aims and actions. In future, teachers must take steps to prevent strikes, demonstrations, outside activities and all such reprehensible actions. . . ."

"Wait a bit!" A clear, excited voice cut into the president's speech, and plump Chang Lien-jui jumped to her feet. Indicating her bandaged head, she called to the president:

"You talk about fair play, President Chiang. Then why are you reading this order which tries to turn black into white? Is it reprehensible for unarmed students to express their patriotism

and protest against the auctioning off of North China by traitors? Why doesn't the Ministry of Education denounce those traitors for the uncalled-for injuries done to so many students like myself? Why doesn't it protect and avenge its own students instead of slandering our fine patriotic action as something reprehensible? . . . Please answer me, President Chiang!"

"Answer! Answer!" came rousing shouts from all over the hall.

Dim as was the hall, those present saw the president's lean face turn pale. His hand holding the order was trembling violently as, biting his lips, he glared at the assembled students. Before he could control his anger enough to speak, more passionate shouting came from all parts of the hall:

"President Chiang! Weren't you angry when the Japanese detained you for three hours — the president of a fine old university?"

"President Chiang! Ask for the mandate of the people! You ought to help the students' just action, and not make up to the authorities for the sake of your rice-bowl!"

". . . . ."

Pandemonium in the hall! Though some secret agents, posted there, called for silence, the angry students were like an erupting volcano belching flames in every direction. More and more searching questions were fired at Chiang Men-lin from all parts of the hall.

The president and other university heads stood on the platform like blocks of wood, staring blankly in silence at the indignant students. When the tumult subsided a little, Dr. Hu Shih with his air of refinement, his gold-rimmed spectacles and smart woollen scarf, pushed President Chiang aside, and took his place to say loudly:

"Now, gentlemen, don't misunderstand President Chiang — his sole concern is for our country and our people. You've cut classes for nearly a week — this can't go on. Are you students or politicians? It takes real ability to save the country. After all this commotion of shaking fists, distributing handbills and shouting slogans — who were the ones to be hurt? Who were beaten up? Thrown into gaol? Who but you inexperienced young students. Our Central Government has its own policy and strategy for dealing with the Japanese. It's no use being foolhardy. So take my advice and find better ways of showing your patriotism. . . ."

This glib speech was punctuated by cries of "Shame!" and "Rubbish!" But when it came to "better ways of showing your patriotism", the students rose in one body and roared:

"Get out!"

"We won't listen!"

"Clear out!"

Dr. Hu Shih was no ordinary man. Far from turning pale when abused as Chiang Meng-lin had done, he tossed back his scarf furiously, put his hands on his hips like a stage villain, and bellowed:

"I'm a state-appointed professor — why should I get out? . . . Try to make me go. . . ."

"Beat him up!"

"Dirty dog!"

"How low can you sink!"

These roars of rage from below still did not alarm Hu Shih, but when students started charging towards the platform, the wily doctor caught hold of Chiang Meng-lin and called to the others, "Quick! Let's go!"

He hurried up the stairs, assuring the terrified president beside him:

"Sheer waste of breath — like casting pearls before swine. . . . Hurry up, Meng-lin!"

Just as Hu Shih shouted his defiance, Teng Yun-hsuan, dragged to his feet by Li Huai-ying, had whispered penitently to Tao-ching at his side:

"You win! We're absolutely right to strike! Ah, what fools scholars can be! . . ."

When Tao-ching left the Third Court with the exultant crowd, Hsiao-yen pushed her way over to her and caught her arm. Red in the face with excitement, she said softly:

"You were right! It was a good idea to come to the meeting. Otherwise Hu Shih wouldn't have lost face so completely!"

Hou Jui, Wu Yu-ping and Liu Li came up just then. They did not say anything to Tao-ching but the elation and approval in their glances told her:

"That was a splendid idea of yours! . . . Nobody can call Peking University backward now!"

Tao-ching glanced at them too but said nothing. Her eyes, however, were conveying her answer:

"Once the masses are aroused, you'll see — they'll make a clean sweep of all these die-hards!"

Chapter 44

Day had not yet dawned when Professor Wang Hung-pin got up, turned on the light and proceeded to dress. He had, indeed, hardly slept at all, for this was to be no ordinary day. Remarkably enough, this scholar now in his fifties, who had buried himself in books all his life, had resolved to take part in the young people's demonstration on December 16: a new struggle, by the Chinese people, to save their country from destruction and win national independence.

Naturally, this was not a simple decision for him to make. He was well aware of the savagery of the reactionary rulers, the countless patriots imprisoned and even killed just for struggling for the minimum democratic rights, and the possibility of his own dismissal from the university, or arrest and imprisonment. Should that happen, his beloved wife and daughters would lose a husband and father, while he would have to undergo sufferings as yet unknown to him. These anxieties and scruples were overridden by the righteous indignation blazing in his heart, which had eventually stirred him into action. He had always been an honest, self-respecting man, loyal to his country and in favour of democracy. He had never submitted to force or violence. Though his association with Hu Shih had confused him on many questions, the help of his progressive colleagues and the encouragement of Hsiao-yen and his students had eventually enabled him to reach a clearer understanding and arm his mind with the scientific principles of dialectical materialism and Marxism-Leninism.

He now clearly saw that history was following its inevitable course and that humanity was heading towards communism, which must in the end triumph all over the world. Furthermore, the firm stand of the Communists in their struggle to defend the interests of the people and the motherland, together with their indomitable scorn of death, drew him towards them with even greater force. He began to despise his own timidity and egoism. He would not admit that he was old or weak. He believed that a man who toiled for nothing more than his own petty needs led a meaningless existence even if he lived to be a hundred. There could be no true happiness in such a life. Accordingly he had given financial support to the December the Ninth Movement and urged his friends to do the same. And now he had decided to take part in the demonstration on December 16, urging his friend Wu Fan-chu and other progressive professors to join in as well. Although some refused for various reasons, he lay awake that night eagerly waiting for the dawn. He was fully dressed before it was light. His wife, who had also awakened, asked hesitantly as she dressed herself:

"Hung-pin, won't you change your mind? It's not as if you were a young man — you're fifty-nine."

"I know, I know!" he answered, hurriedly pouring out hot water to wash his face. "You may not know it, my dear, but some men are still young at ninety, while others are old at twenty. My mind's made up, so please don't say any more!" He picked up his spectacles from the table and began polishing the lenses. Presently a thought struck him which made him say to his wife, "This pair of glasses isn't strong enough. Judging by what happened on December 9, we may expect some rough handling today. Do you mind finding me that pair with tortoise-shell rims? They're more substantial. If my glasses

get broken, I shan't be able to walk very far with these near-sighted eyes of mine."

Mrs. Wang made no move but stood looking at him anxiously.

"Hung-pin, you are becoming more and more of a child! Is this a joking matter? We've let Hsiao-yen join the revolution, but do consider that I'm nearly fifty this year and Hsiao-yen's sisters are still young. If you go out at your age in this cold and anything happens. . . ." The affectionate wife and kind mother could not go on, but started wiping her eyes.

Much to her surprise, Professor Wang only laughed. Patting her shoulder he said with a smile:

"You women are all the same! Like a hen with a brood of chicks! If no one ever dared take a little risk, the world would soon come to an end! Please go and get me something to eat. I want to have a good breakfast so as not to lag behind those young fellows today."

Mrs. Wang prepared a big bowl of noodles with eggs for him, as well as some fried cakes. She watched anxiously while he ate the hearty meal. Her aging husband seemed to have become a boy again. He was acting like an active youngster impatient to be off to a dance. After finishing his breakfast he looked out of the window and saw that it was still dark. Then in the brightly lit room he began searching for something, first in his pockets and then in the drawers of his desk. Finally he assembled his favourite fountain pen, a few lists of names and addresses, a thick pile of notebooks and several keys. These he handed over respectfully to his wife, saying with a smile:

"I'm giving you the things I set most store by. In the unlikely event that I don't come back, you must take good care of them for me. They represent many years of hard work and study."

Mrs. Wang, who had been watching him steadily, suddenly lowered her head and burst into tears. Doing her best to conceal her distress, she wrapped the things up in a cloth. Then she looked up and declared more firmly than he had ever known her to speak before:

"Hung-ping, I'm going with you!"

"But . . . how can you?" he asked, amazed that his gentle, timid wife should contemplate taking part in this dangerous struggle.

"If you can, why can't I?" Her voice was so firm and determined that he could say nothing more. After a few seconds' silence he stretched out both hands and responded eagerly:

"Very good! We'll go together! So our ranks are to be reinforced by an elderly Amazon! But who will take care of these things for me?"

"I'll hand them over to Ling-yen," she said decidedly. With that, as if she were setting off on a long journey, she went to get food and clothes for herself and to turn over the housekeeping to her second daughter. This done, she stepped out with her husband into the bright early morning.

A cold wind in their faces, the old couple hurried to the girls' hostel in search of Hsiao-yen. They did not find her there but learned that she had gone to the East Hostel. When they reached the grounds in front of this, the sight of hundreds of chattering, boisterous students came as a shock to Professor Wang. There was a shrill babel of voices raised in discussion, arguments and shouts. All at once his student Wang Chung launched into a speech, gesticulating with thin arms from the middle of one crowd. The early morning sun lit up his lean, pale face.

"Fellow students!" called the monkey-faced Wang Chung. "The speaker just now for the Students' Association was right on only a few small counts. We students of Peking University ought to wake up to the real state of affairs and not be afraid to give our lives in the struggle. But whom are we fighting? Who are our enemies? I must warn you all not to become the victims or tools of certain capitulationist factions. Don't let's shed our warm blood into a cesspool again! Wake up to what's happening! Some people are calling loudly for a united front against Japan, when what they really want is a united front of capitulation. In name they are co-operating with the

Kuomintang, but in fact they are collaborating with the traitors who are selling the country. . . .

"On December 9 many of us were cruelly deceived. We were told this was a protest against the sell-out of North China. But in fact we played into their hands, letting them use our lives as political capital to win official positions and enrich themselves. We mustn't fall into the same trap again! We young people who are truly patriotic want to overthrow not only Japanese imperialism but all imperialism. We must not let ourselves be fooled. A revolution means making a clean sweep. Just shouting a few slogans in the streets is no use whatever!"

Monkey-face's harangue was cut short by the angry students who hissed and cried, "Don't talk rot!" Some, however, shook their heads doubtfully, while others even turned away.

When Professor Wang saw this, he looked anxiously at his wife and whispered:

"What's to be done? The dirty dog!" While he was speaking, he actually saw some students throw away the flags they were holding and begin to turn back. The old couple's eyes glowed with sudden delight at the sight of a girl in the crowd who was talking in a way that commanded attention, her head raised high, her hands gesturing forcefully. It was their own dear Hsiao-yen, usually so serious and quiet. Pointing an accusing finger at Wang Chung, she called out in a thrilling voice:

"Fellow students! Let me say a few words based on my own bitter, shameful experience. Wang Chung of the History Department is a shameless Trotskyite and a spy working for the Kuomintang and the C.C. clique. I was cruelly deceived by them, as some of you know. They use all kinds of methods to take people in, cheating and deceiving immature and inexperienced students to drag them on to a fearful and wicked path. Without realizing their real role I was led astray by them to do many dreadful things, but now I have seen through them! They can't fool me again!

"Fellow students, don't let them fool a single one of you! Today, after a six day's strike, all of us Peiping students are going to carry out a big demonstration to strike terror into the hearts of the traitors and give fresh courage to the faltering. What warm-blooded student, with any conscience at all, is willing to see our beautiful motherland fall into enemy hands? Which of us can bear to look on while our enemies, the imperialists and the traitors, ride roughshod over this grand land of ours, where our forbears have lived for countless generations? Only scum like Wang Chung!"

Unable to contain herself any longer, Hsiao-yen rushed angrily over to Wang Chung, who was gaping at her, waiting for a chance to refute her, and slapped him resoundingly on his thin face, crying furiously, "Take that, you spy!" At that moment it was hard to recognize her as the gentle, refined Wang Hsiao-yen who had always buried herself in books.

"Give him hell! Beat him up, the swine!" yelled lusty voices from the crowd, while the students who had been on the point of leaving came back again. Wang Chung and his accomplices were surrounded by the angry crowd, and a hubbub arose all round. "Beat them! Beat them up! Dirty dogs!" The handful of secret agents were taught a good lesson. When Professor Wang saw this, he could not help calling out:

"Good for you, Hsiao-yen! You did right! They deserved a beating. Serves them right!"

As soon as the Kuomintang agents saw that things were going against them, they hunched their shoulders and sneaked off through the crowd. Professor Wang, pulling his wife along with him, hurried to his daughter through the excited students now busily forming ranks. He scrutinized her as though he hardly recognized her. Finally he raised one thumb and commented with a broad smile:

"Fine, Hsiao-yen! You passed that test with flying colours! You exposed them so effectively that they didn't even have time to retaliate — they took to their heels helter-skelter. That was a sight for sore eyes!"

"Dad! Mum!" murmured Hsiao-yen in a scarcely audible voice, flushing all over her face as she looked at them. "Don't talk so loudly, daddy! You're making me blush! I've been such a fool. . . ." The thought of the harmful role she had been tricked into playing almost made her weep for shame, but seeing her parents' eager, expectant attitude, she broke into a smile. Seizing her mother's hand, she asked with concern, "What are you doing here, mother?"

Without waiting for his wife to reply, Professor Wang explained, "Your mother has changed too. Naturally, with our example. . . . That's why she's come. Well, when do we start?"

"We're going to assemble now and march to join the others outside the West Hostel." Hsiao-yen was on the point of hurrying off when, from the rapidly forming ranks, enthusiastic voices called out:

"Three cheers for Professor Wang Hung-pin! And hurrah for Mrs. Wang! Professor Wang has come to join our demonstration!" The storm of applause carried to where he stood.

For the first time in his life Professor Wang blushed like a girl. As he looked across at these students with sincerity shining in their eyes, he had to swallow hard to keep back his tears. Waving one hand in acknowledgement of their greetings, he gripped his wife's arm with the other and walked slowly, as shyly as a schoolchild, to join their now orderly ranks.

Chapter 45

Within a week of December 9, the Party rallied round itself thousands of progressive students and other young patriots eager to work for national liberation. The strength of the Party and the people was growing rapidly. In order to follow up the success of the movement by arousing more opposition to the formation of the "Hopei-Chahar Political Council" which would mean selling out North China, the Party members who were leading the Students' Federation convened a special meeting. They hired a room in the Changan Hotel on the evening of December 15, and over a mahjong table drew up a plan of action. The bogus "Hopei-Chahar Political Council" was to be established on the next day, December 16, and they decided to mobilize the Peiping students for an even larger demonstration on the same day.

Hsu Hui roused Tao-ching from sleep late that night, told her the details of the plan for the next day and after putting her in charge at Peking University she hurried on to another school to spread the information.

Tao-ching was busy all night. Thanks to the help of Hou Jui and other Party members and activists, in less than four hours a contingent of students was mobilized for the demonstration. At the same time provision was made for propaganda, picketing and liaison groups.

At last the preparations were completed down to the last detail. Just before dawn Tao-ching, then in the girl students' hostel, lay down on Chang Lien-jui's bed to rest and was seized by a fit of coughing. Her heart began to beat furiously as a wave of dizziness overwhelmed her. She felt better, however, after a brief rest. Then singing and shouting sounded in the streets and she leaped up, gulped some cold water, and hurried out.

It was to be a strenuous day for her. Although the main plan was worked out, she did not feel altogether easy in her mind until she had hurried to the East Hostel and had the final arrangements confirmed by Hou Jui. Then she joined the crowd going to assemble by the West Hostel.

The university and high school students of Peiping were organized in four units, three in the city and one in the suburbs. The first unit was headed by Northeast University, the second by China University, the third by Peking University, and that in the suburbs by Tsinghua University. They were all to start at seven in the morning and assemble in the neighbourhood of the Bridge of Heaven. After that they were to enter the city by Chien Men, pass Tien An Men and proceed past the Eastern Arch to Waichiaopu Street until they came to the Bureau of Foreign Affairs, where the "Hopei-Chahar Political Council" was to be inaugurated and where they would make their mass protest.

Although the sun had not yet risen, people were hurrying through the streets in twos and threes, and snatches of stirring songs carried clearly through the cold, wintry air.

As Tao-ching sped along, she ran into Li Huai-ying, who was dressed plainly, not in her high-heeled shoes or fur coat. Wearing a simple blue cotton-padded gown which contrasted vividly with her pink and white complexion, she looked even more attractive than usual. She seized Tao-ching's hand and confided happily:

"Tao-ching! Today I'm going to be one of the rank and file — I can no longer stand idly by. Why hasn't Hsiao-yen shown up? Have you seen her? Why are you so pale?"

"One of the rank and file? Good for you!" Tao-ching nodded with a smile, ignoring Huai-ying's last question. "Hsiao-yen has gone to the East Hostel. Are you going to the West Hostel? Let's go together."

Snatches of songs were rippling through the biting morning air.

Our rifles pointed at the foe,
We march in orderly array.
. . . .
Our rank strong as iron,
Our hearts firm as steel,
We shall defend our nation
And win lasting freedom.

Peking University students were converging on the West Hostel. Stirring yet faintly melancholy songs could be heard from every side.

Sleepy people roused from their beds asked, "What are the students up to? Another patriotic demonstration? Good for them!"

At seven o'clock, the contingent of Peking University students marched out of the West Hostel with their big banners flying, and the grey-coated soldiers and black-coated police, who had been lying in wait, charged them like a gale of wind.

"Go back!" they roared. "Back inside, all of you! Trying to start a riot, are you?" Yelling threats and flashing their bayonets, these thugs surrounded the students and tore their bright banners to shreds.

"Rush them! Break through! . . ." Angry shouts rent the cold wintry air.

It was Tao-ching who gave the lead in these cries of defiance.

"Rush them! Rush them!" A hundred students linked arms in a furious attempt to break through the encirclement.

With fixed bayonets and leather thongs, the military blocked their way. The students were too few to break through the cordon. What were they to do? It would soon be time to assemble by the Bridge of Heaven.

At this critical moment, reinforcements arrived from the East Hostel and with their help the encircled students were able to force their way out. The rousing cheers and shouts which greeted their success left the police gaping in astonishment. Despite their bright bayonets and glinting machine-guns, they were now powerless to keep back the onrushing students. So the young people who had succeeded in joining forces quickly formed ranks of four and marched off.

Peking University, like many other schools, had many more students in the December 16 demonstration than in the previous one. After the first parade, the garrison commander had forbidden Peiping newspapers to publish news of student demonstrations, and had sent large forces of police and gendarmes to blockade a number of schools. The bloodshed on December 9 and the Party's timely, effective propaganda had opened young people's eyes to the vicious nature of the reactionaries, and they were now quick to act — a few hours of preparation had been enough to mobilize nearly all the students of Peking University.

Soon after the students from the East and West Hostels had joined forces, Tao-ching noticed that Teng Yun-hsuan, fourth-year student of the Department of Chinese Literature, had joined the demonstrators. He was the oldest and most studious member of his class, and had not taken part in the December 9 parade, but today he was out with the others. He was wearing a grey padded gown and black woollen cap, and was holding on his thick-lensed glasses with one hand and gripping his neighbour's arm with the other as if to keep himself from falling. As he moved quickly along he happened to turn and catch sight of Tao-ching behind him. He greeted her with nods of pleased surprise, and called back:

"So you've come too! Good! I need your help and advise."

"How d'you feel — nervous?" asked Tao-ching with a smile.

"Certainly not!" he protested earnestly. "It's just what I expected!" Realizing that he was falling behind, with a hurried wave, he scuttled off.

At East Chingshan Street the students halted abruptly, for there by the road stood a small force of soldiers and police with a fire-hose already trained in their direction. Hou Jui, Tao-ching and the other Party members raised a shout:

"Get that hose!" cried Tao-ching as she prepared to charge forward.

At once the cry was taken up by others:

"Grab that hose! Don't let them use it!" Hou cried as he charged forward too.

Followed by the most enterprising students, the Party members rushed to seize the hose. The other angry youngsters also charged fearlessly, and as soon as the black-coats found themselves outmatched they dropped the hose and fled. The students had won an easy victory. That same moment they were overtaken by Wang Hsiao-yen, Li Shao-tung and Chang Lien-jui, who were carrying two new banners which they had just completed. Then exultant cheers took the place of angry slogans.

"Fellow students! Victory is ours!"

Tao-ching felt a happiness she had never known before as she stood in the ranks, her pale, thin face flushed with joy. The tasks given her by the Party were being carried out one by one and for a Party member there could be no greater happiness.

But not everything was working out so easily. Although it was not far from East Chingshan Street to the Bridge of Heaven, where they were to assemble, progress became more difficult with every step. Increasing numbers of soldiers and police were posted along the route by the authorities to block the students' advance. Hose-pipes and fire-fighting equipment of every kind were in evidence on the streets. Tao-ching and the other Party members mingled with the students, helping them to seize hoses, whenever possible, and to destroy the fire-fighting apparatus. With bare fists they fought back against the brutal police who were obstructing their progress. Tao-ching, Hsiao-yen and Huai-ying were knocked down several times, their hair was dishevelled, their faces were swollen and bleeding, but like many others they struggled to their feet at once and continued on their way undaunted.

Professor Wang had set out with his wife on his arm and had advanced with the other marchers. He shouted slogans until his voice was hoarse. Then, trembling with excitement, he became too exhausted to keep up with the rest, and Mrs. Wang had to support him. He had rushed forward as impetuously as a young man during the fiercest clashes; but his students kept him safe in the centre of their group. Filled with respect for their old professor, they formed an escort around him and helped him forward step by step through the bitter cold.

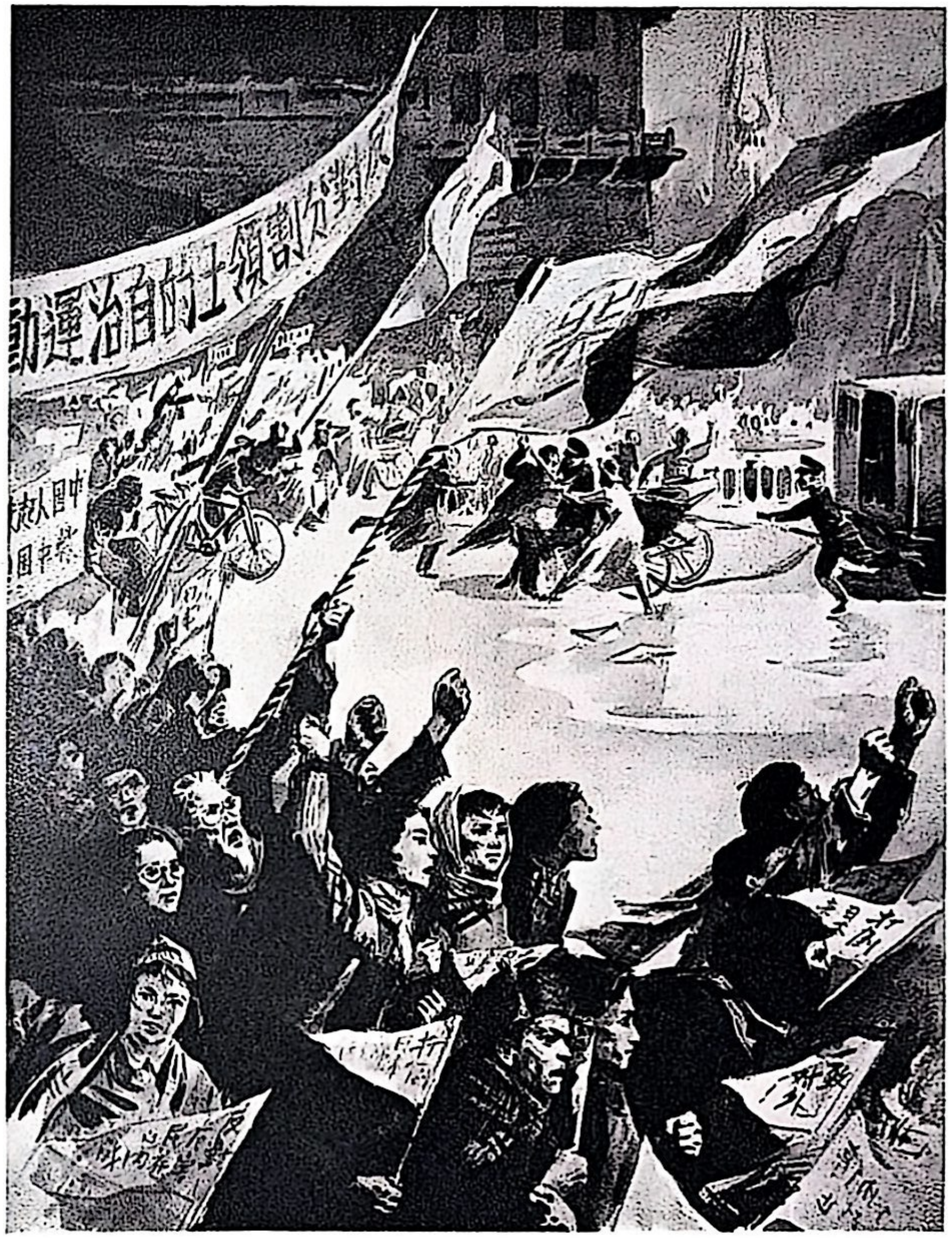
He was proceeding in this way when someone shouted:

"Old Wang! Professor Wang!"

The voice sounded familiar. The professor turned his head but could not make out who had called. Finally it was Mrs. Wang, still by his side, who pointed to someone and said:

"Look, isn't that Old Wu?"

Professor Wang stood on tiptoe in the crowd and peered around till at last he saw Professor Wu Fan-chu in the ranks next to his own. Wu's bald, round head, so like a watermelon, was conspicuous among the young black heads around him. Professor Wang also saw some other white-haired professors, bare-headed in the piercing wind now, their hats having been knocked off by the police.


反對分割領土的自治運動

Exulting in the presence of so many colleagues, he turned to his wife with glowing eyes and said:

"Look over there!" But before he could point out the white heads, his attention was caught by a clash a little further off between some demonstrators and the police. Startled, he exclaimed, "Why, those are workers! They've joined the parade too!" He was waving one arm and calling out in excitement when a long whip lashed out and cut his head. The professor seethed with fury. Not troubling to see who had struck the blow which had, in fact, drawn blood, he raised his fist and shouted:

"Brother workers! Welcome! Let all the people of our country unite!"

"Brother workers, unite!" Professor Wang's hoarse shout was taken up by innumerable young throats. The furious anger on the professor's face gave way to a look of childish delight as he saw the workers and students break through a forest of swords and whips to clasp hands and throw their arms around each other. His eyes became moist. Squeezing his wife's hand as they trudged on, he told her breathlessly:

"We are united! The whole of China will unite like this to fight the enemy!"

At the outset, the procession consisted almost entirely of students — more than ninety per cent of the tens of thousands of marchers were from Peiping universities, colleges and high schools, their staff accounted for the rest. But the stirring shouts of the demonstrators, the handbills that came fluttering down like snowflakes and the brutality of the police brought about a change in the ranks, which were unobtrusively swelled by workers, pedlars, government employees, ricksha-men, newspaper reporters, young housewives and even ex-servicemen. They took flags from the students and, like soldiers setting off for the front, regardless of their own danger, they resolutely joined the demonstration.

Tao-ching did her best to keep pace with the Peking University contingent, summoning up every ounce of strength she could from her weakened body.

Ranks were constantly being broken so that some of the marchers lost touch with their own unit, and Hsiao-yen and Huai-ying were missing. The liaison group was busy keeping in touch, while the picket did its best to maintain order. Thanks to these efforts, the scattered marchers were soon proceeding in orderly fashion again. Slowly but steadily they were able to advance.

When they reached the General Post Office inside Chien Men, Tao-ching flushed red with anger and bit her lips. She seemed about to swerve to one side. . . .

"What's the matter?" asked the student by her, pulling her back.

"It's nothing. Let's go on!" A strange smile at the corners of her mouth, Tao-ching marched on again calmly.

What had happened was this:

Tao-ching was marching on the left side of the road with her unit past the General Post Office, when the sight of a man at the top of the post-office steps gave her a fearful shock. It was Yu Yung-tse — there was no mistaking him! He was standing there talking and gesticulating with a wealthy-looking man in Western clothes. When Tao-ching's stern gaze met his small, bright eyes, she saw that he was enjoying the spectacle of the marchers, her own battered, livid face and bleeding cheeks. Resisting the temptation to spring forward and denounce him, she soon calmed herself and turned away with hatred and scorn.

Outside Chien Men they were joined by cheering demonstrators from over a dozen other schools, including Northeast University, Peiping University, Normal University and Hungta High School. Their augmented columns continued south and before long met the Tsinghua and Yenching contingents who had scaled the west city wall to enter the city proper. The lusty cheers which hailed this amalgamation of forces even moved some of the troops there to down weapons. A young soldier came up quietly to Professor Wang and saluting him said softly:

"We're Chinese too. . . . But orders are orders. We can't help ourselves. . . ." He dabbed at his eyes with his sleeve and walked reluctantly back to his post.

At the Bridge of Heaven, chosen as the place of assembly, twenty thousand demonstrators had gathered. Forming orderly ranks, they held their first rally with the residents who crowded the streets and who later joined the procession. Then the reinforced columns began their march back to Chien Men. When the crowd surged up to the iron city gates, however, they found them tightly closed. Sharp gunfire pierced the icy air, bullets whistled over the demonstrators' heads.

"Keep calm! Don't panic!" came the swift command from the organizers to Hou Jui, Tao-ching and the various other group leaders. Then in the slanting rays of the winter sun the demonstrators, tens of thousands strong, stood steady as a mountain under fire. No one moved, no one broke ranks. Clenching their fists, they glared angrily at the bullets flying overhead, not fear but mounting fury in their hearts.

There was no sound but that of gunfire. In that moment of uncanny silence, Tao-ching saw something which made her doubt her own eyes. As if appearing from nowhere, a tall young man with a face like granite sprang on to the top of a tram parked outside the gate. It was Chiang Hua! She had heard nothing of him for several days, yet here he was despite his injury. The sight of him made Tao-ching's heart pound for joy. Standing on the roof of the tram, his head held high, oblivious of all danger, he called to the students and other people around who had remained calm under fire:

"Fellow students who love your motherland! Countrymen who refuse to be slaves! . . ." His deep voice carried well through the frosty air. Most of the demonstrators had had nothing to eat or drink all day but, forgetting hunger, cold and the threatening array of force against them, they stood on tiptoe, straining their ears to hear this spokesman of the Students' Federation.

"We are demonstrating today for one purpose only — to express the real will of the people. Those who claim that the movement for autonomy in North China is the people's will are spreading lying rumours cooked up by the Japanese, by collaborators and traitors. It's a fraud! A low, dirty trick! . . ."

A burst of applause drowned the spasmodic rifle shots. From the throats of the citizens of Peiping, who far outnumbered the student demonstrators, burst stormy slogans:

"Down with Japanese imperialism! . . ."

"Down with the collaborators and traitors! . . ."

These slogans were followed by a volley of shots. At that same moment, Chiang Hua disappeared from the scene. Tao-ching wondered fearfully, "What's happened? Has he been arrested? Wounded? . . ." But in that tense hour of struggle, personal affairs counted for so little that her concern was only momentary. Passionately identifying herself with the vast crowd, she shouted with the others on behalf of the whole Chinese nation:

"Down with Japanese imperialism!"

"People of China, rise to save the country!"

"Oppose the autonomous movement! End the partitioning of our territory!"

"End the civil war! Unite against foreign aggression!"

"All who refuse to be slaves, rise up and fight!"

Tao-ching's voice was hoarse, tens of thousands were hoarse from shouting. Their dusty faces were streaked with blood and tears. Not far ahead she saw Professor Wang and his wife. Although the professor's spectacles had been broken, his baggy cotton-padded gown badly torn, and although there was clotted blood on his grimy face, he was standing confidently in the front rank, holding his wife's arm firmly.

"Some people are working for a sacred cause, others are leading a shameless life of indulgence." As these words came to Tao-ching's mind, she seemed to see in that huge, thoroughly aroused crowd, the faces of Lu Chia-chuan, Lin Hung, Liu Yi-feng, Chao Yu-ching and her own Chiang Hua, who in spite of his injuries had stood up to speak. Then she had a picture of Hu Meng-an's vicious features, Tai Yu's sullen, bloated face, Yu Yung-tse's bright, beady eyes. . . . The enormous crowd, the staccato rifle-fire, the blood-stains on many a face, and the stirring singing made her head whirl. Weak, over-excited and exhausted, she suddenly felt faint and would have fallen had the girl next to her not caught her in time and supported her with strong arms. Although they had never met before, they hugged each other tightly.

The city gate could not shut out the dauntless young demonstrators. Like fighters attacking a strongly fortified point, group after group stormed the gate in the teeth of the howling wind. At last the enemy had to give in and admit the angry crowd, which swept into the city like a tidal wave. The mighty ranks resumed their advance.

"Down with Japanese imperialism!"

"Fellow countrymen! Organize and arm yourselves! People of China, rise to save the country!"

Bright waved the banners over the streets of the ancient capital as, hoarsely shouting their heart-stirring slogans, the unending columns of demonstrators strode steadily forward, forward and ever forward. . . .

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